

FIVE CENTS

BRAVE AND BOLD

A DIFFERENT COMPLETE STORY EVERY WEEK

No. 53

THE CRIMSON CROSS

or The Mystery of his Birth



BY

BERNARD MAXWELL

The detective raised the light on high, and even while he, as well as the others, gazed in astonishment upon the strange scene, a cry of triumph broke from his lips. "Behold!" he cried, "there is the mark of the Crimson Cross; he is the stolen heir to the estates and title of Lyle!"

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Issued Weekly. By Subscription \$2.50 per year. Entered according to Act of Congress in the year 1903, in the Office of the Librarian of Congress, Washington, D. C. STREET & SMITH, 238 William St., N. Y.

No. 53.

NEW YORK, December 26, 1903.

Price Five Cents.

THE CRIMSON CROSS;

OR,

The Mystery of His Birth.

By BERNARD MAXWELL

CHAPTER I.

JACK.

"Give me that money," said Salty Sam.

"I won't," said Jack; "it belongs to me, and you would only drink it up."

"Curse your imperance," roared the man. "What is it to you if I does drink? Hand over that money, or I'll break yer back."

"I won't," said the boy. "I earned it by hard work, and you're not going to drink it up if I know myself. I'm getting too big to be scared or bullied by you."

The two speakers, a grim, weather-beaten man of middle age, and a straight, sinewy boy of sixteen, handsome, muscular and quick as a flash, stood on the bleak, east shore of Staten Island, fronting on the blue waters of Gowanus Bay; near them stood a rude house among the rocks and trees, but otherwise the surroundings were natural and wild.

The man was known as Sam Stokes; his time was passed in fishing in the salt water, and he had contracted the nickname of "Salty." With his wife and his son Jack, as he claimed the boy to be, he lived on the shores of the bay, though the people in the neighborhood wondered at

the amount of money that Salty sometimes exhibited, his sole apparent source of income being from his fishing.

The boy stood facing him defiantly, and the man changed his tone of command to one of whispering entreaty.

"Ain't I yer father?" he said, in a very soft-soapy style. "Gimme the money, and I'll take care of it fer yer."

"I can take care of it myself," said the resolute boy; "and what's more, I really don't believe that you are my father."

"What!" screamed Salty Sam, his features purpling with rage; "I'm not yer father. Say that again, and I'll twist yer neck!"

"I repeat it!" said the dauntless Jack. "I've got better blood in my veins than I could have inherited from either you or old Sal! I believe you stole me from somebody, and one of these days——"

He broke off short in the impulsive and irresistible speech that escaped his lips, for the old fisherman had leaped upon him with a howl of rage, aiming an open-handed cuff at the right ear of the boy, which would have knocked him endwise if it had reached home.

But the nimble-footed boy was too quick for the old salt. He ducked his head as Sam rushed upon him, very neatly

darted between Salty's legs, and with a quick motion of his body sent the old salt reeling end over end down the sandy beach.

Salty Sam got upon his feet, with his little eyes fairly twinkling with rage, and made another dash at Jack, who was laughing heartily over his victory.

The sun was just setting, and the slanting beams flashed in the old sailor's eyes as he rushed forward; therefore the boy had him at a disadvantage, and by cleverly butting at the stomach of his foe, sent him over again; but as Salty fell to the beach, he grasped the boy's clothes in his strong fingers and pulled him over.

"Now, curse ye!" he cried, making a blind clutch at the boy's throat, "I'll show yer whether I'm yer father or not."

But the nimble youth slipped out of his clutch like an eel, and dashed swiftly down toward the water.

In an instant Salty Sam was rushing after him.

The old fisherman's boat was rocking on the water, held to the beach by halyards tied to a stake.

Jack ran swiftly toward it, drawing his knife from his pocket as he dashed along, for he had resolved to cut away the rope and make off with the boat.

He opened the blade of his penknife, leaped fearlessly into the water and cut the halyard, and then clambered into the boat, only to find, as he moved off with the tide, that the oars were missing, and that he was wholly at the mercy of the wind and tide in the old yawl.

"Come back! Come back," shouted the old salt, shaking his fist at the boy, "or I'll break every bone in your body."

"You're welcome to do it if you can only catch me!" shouted back Jack. "Good-by, my dear Salty. Give my respects to the old lady. I expect to come back in a year or two and pay you for this boat—good-by, Stokes."

The tide was running up to the two cits from the ocean, and the yawl was soon bowling gently along with the current, taking a wide whirl with every eddy and pool, and making good time toward the distant metropolis.

On the bank stood Salty Sam, shaking his fists in impotent rage at the receding Jack, who stood up in the stern of the yawl and blew kisses to the angry man until the shadows of night shut his form out of view.

Then Jack began seriously to consider the step he had taken, and, though it was not wise or prudent, he did not regret it.

He said to himself that he had stood the abuse of old Sam Stokes as long as he ought; as he had plainly stated, he did not believe that Salty was his father.

There was nothing within his breast that made such a relation possible, and now the thought leaped to his brain that he must be somebody's child, the son of some father.

Who was that father, and where in the wide world should he seek him?

While musing in this fashion he kept floating up the bay in the gathering darkness, and when he was about opposite Prospect Park he was aroused from his reverie in a most startling manner.

"Help!"

The shrill cry, a woman's voice calling aloud in tones of terror for aid, pierced through the gathering gloom and brought the brave boy erect in the yawl.

Close to him, dimly discernible in the shade of the starless night, were two boats, one large and the other small.

In the large one five men were distinguished by the boy, while in the small one he made out the forms of a lady and a little girl shrinking under the protecting arm of their boatman, who, even as Jack glanced at him, was struck down with a blow from an oar in the hands of one of the ruffians.

The yawl had drifted up alongside of the two other boats unnoticed, and now, as one of the men leaned forward to pull the little girl from the boat, Jack was upon him like a young tiger.

He leaped from the seat of the yawl, and landed fairly upon the shoulders of the stroke oar, and with ready fist fetched the rascal who was seizing the girl such a clip on the head that he shot over the side of the boat and went floundering into the bay.

Then, trying to work quickly, while the crew were surprised by this sudden onset, Jack leaped into the boat occupied by the two females and seized the oars from the hands of the senseless boatman.

But before he could take a stroke, indeed, before his oars were adjusted in the rowlocks, the brutal crew of the larger craft recovered their wits.

"Knock him on the head!"

"Kill the cub!"

"Fish the cap'n out!"

"Grab the girl!"

Like so many pistol shots these commands were ripped out, and, while one of the brutes made a clutch at the ruffian who had been knocked into the water by the boy, another grabbed the girl by her long, fair hair, and sought to drag her over the gunwales.

"Let go, you brute!" shouted Jack, while the lady, who was the mother of the young miss, screamed piteously. "Let go, or I'll teach you——"

Poor Jack! His sentence was cut off as short as his willing courage, for at that instant the iron-bound blade of an oar whirled through the air and landed on his head, and as he fell back in the boat he was grasped by the heels and pulled into the large boat along with the girl, who seemed dumb with terror, and at the word of command the ruffian crew bent to their oars and darted away, with Jack and

the girl in their clutches, just as the police boat *Causee* dashed up to the spot.

A flashing calcium light was turned upon the boat where the screaming lady still sat, wringing her hands, and a man on the deck cried out:

"Annie!"

The lady looked up, saw the speaker, and then fainted away, and in less than a moment the man had her in his arms, while on the deck of the boat Detective Dawson was saying:

"Had to faint just when we wanted to find out the cause of the rumpus. Wonder whether I really did see a boy get knocked down or not? If she hadn't fainted we'd have caught the rascals."

CHAPTER II.

"A CRIMSON CROSS."

"Mr. Clifton!" announced the office boy, opening the door of the snug retreat and ushering into the presence of Detective Dawson a handsomely dressed man of perhaps thirty-five years of age.

The brisk New York detective arose to greet his distinguished-looking visitor.

"Good-morning, sir," he said.

The visitor returned the salutation.

"Detective Dawson?" he said, inquiringly.

"The same, sir," was the reply.

"My name is Clifton—Sir Francis Clifton," went on the visitor, seating himself in the chair that Dawson had placed for him. "I have come to this country to find, if possible, a boy who was stolen when an infant, some sixteen years or so ago, and I have come to you to aid me in my search."

"Very good," said Dawson. "Please let me have the whole story."

"There is not very much to tell," said the noble visitor. "Sixteen years ago the happy parents, Lord and Lady Lyle, possessed a handsome baby boy, and one day it suddenly went from their sight. At the same time there disappeared a woman named Sally, who had been employed as nurse. Frank Faulkner, the brother of the unfortunate Lady Lyle, began the search for him immediately, but nothing has ever been heard of the lost one. Faulkner is now in this country——"

"I know him," interrupted Dawson. "He is the captain of the police boat *Causee*, and I was with him last night. He is known as one of the most fearless officers in the service of the government."

"I am glad that you know him," said the nobleman. "I hope to have his aid also, although he gave up the case long ago."

"Go on with your story," said Dawson.

"Well," resumed Sir Francis, "the father of the stolen child pined for a long while, and then set off to search for him, leaving his wife and estate under the care of his younger brother, Lawrence Lyle; and since then he has not been heard from, and it is commonly supposed that he died in some foreign land, unknown. Lady Lyle lived in a very secluded manner for many years, but lately I formed her acquaintance, and asked her to be my wife. She told me that she could never marry while the fate of her child was unknown. Then I offered to search for him; she said that I might claim my own reward if I found the lost heir; so here I am, believing America to be the best place to begin the search in."

"You are perfectly right," said the sharp thief-taker. "But have you any little thing which may be used as a clew?"

"Yes," returned Sir Francis, "there is one very slight——"

"Mr. Dawson," interrupted the office boy, his head popping into view, "there is an old man out in the ante-room, and he wants to see you awful bad."

"Tell him I'm busy," said Dawson. "Will see him presently."

"But he says he must see you now," persisted the boy. "He is awfully excited; keeps talking about some boy, and is all the while muttering to himself that there'll be the devil to pay if he don't get the boy in his hands again."

The talk about a boy arrested the attention of the two men, and impulsively they looked at each other.

"Shall I have him in?" asked Dawson.

"Yes," said Sir Francis. "Heaven only knows by what means we may find our boy, and we must seize upon every slight clew that chance may present."

"Show him in," said Dawson.

"Yes, sir," and the boy vanished.

"Hide me somewhere," said Sir Francis.

"Get in here," cried Dawson, opening the door of a roomy closet in which stood a chair. "Here you can see and hear what passes."

The nobleman seated himself in the snug recess and closed the door, and at that moment the office boy opened the door of the office and announced:

"Mr. Stokes."

Yes, it was Salty Sam, the bullying old sailor fisherman, who had come to Dawson to seek his aid in recovering the spirited lad who had escaped from his clutches.

He was terribly excited, and was as nervous as could be, and it was evident to the eyes of the experienced detective that his visitor was under the effect of some fear that was keeping him in a constant state of apprehension.

"Well, Mr. Stokes, what can I do for you in my line of business?" asked Dawson.

"I've lost my boy," broke out the excited old fisherman,

"and I want yer ter find the cub for me. He ran off, went up the bay in my old yawl, nary an oar, just as the night was coming on. S'pose he might a-run in some wharf in this city, and maybe he's running around the town."

"He's not your own boy, you say?" suddenly exclaimed Dawson.

As he asked the abrupt question the detective fixed his keen eyes upon the fisherman.

"Eh! What! Not my son? Who says he's not my son?"

But for all that the color receded from the ruddy face, and the detective smiled to himself.

"I understood you so," he said. "So he is your son. Well, what about the lad? When did he run away?"

"Last night, just as night was coming on."

"From where?"

"I live on the east shore of Staten Island."

The detective's eyes glistened.

"Describe him."

Salty Sam essayed the task.

"What color eyes?" asked the detective.

"Black."

"Hair?"

"Blacker yet."

"Age?"

"Sixteen."

The detective's eyes fairly snapped as he heard the answer.

"And what was the cause of his running away from you?" asked Dawson.

"No cause at all," whined Salty, who was half drunk and half excited. "Get the young rascal for me, and I'll give yer fifty dollars for the job."

And to himself the salt muttered:

"He'll kill me if I don't get him back."

Dawson heard every word.

"When shall I come again?" asked Salty.

"In a week," said Dawson.

"All right," said the half-drunken Stokes, arising to go. Dawson restrained him.

"What's in the wind?" demanded Salty.

"The boy's name, for one thing."

"Ay! that's true," said Sam. "His name be Jack."

"Jack Stokes?"

"Ay, Jack Stokes."

"Does he look like his father?"

"The very image of him over again," replied the excited fisherman, and then stopped with a jerk and added: "That is to say, yer honor, his eyes is black, and so's mine, yer see."

"Certainly," said the shrewd Dawson.

"Well, Mr. Stokes, you may pay me ten dollars down

in order to insure the affair for both sides, and I will try to restore your boy to you in one week."

"Done, sir," said the old salt, and paid the retainer. "You've got a big name, but I'll say yer deserve it if yer find the boy and give him back to me."

"I guess I can do it," said Dawson. "We shall meet in a week from to-day."

"Right, sir. Mornin'," said Salty Sam, and clattered out of the office.

Sir Francis Clifton came forth from the closet with sparkling eyes.

"You wormed a good deal out of him," he said, to the smiling detective, "and strangely enough it seemed that the boy really did not belong to him. How wonderful it would be to find the missing heir by means of this little case. But can you find this boy?"

"Yes, I can," returned Dawson. "I am confident that I saw him last night, and as soon as I can see Capt. Faulkner I shall know in whose hands the boy is."

"I will not try to pry into your business," said the nobleman, looking wonderingly at the great legal ferret. "Let us continue. Where were we?"

"Talking of the heir," said Dawson. "You said there was a slight clew."

"Ay!" cried Sir Francis. "But we shall have to find the boy to find the clew. The heir must be determined upon by a birthmark."

"Where?"

"On his right shoulder."

"And what is the mark?" demanded Dawson, leaning forward eagerly. And Sir Francis replied:

"A crimson cross."

CHAPTER III.

MUDDLER.

When Jack came back to his senses he found himself lying in the bottom of the boat, while the ruffian oarsmen were pulling steadily over the dark waters. The boy cast his eyes slyly around him without lifting his head.

He could catch the glimmer and flash of thousands of lights on either hand, and he readily conjectured that they were either in New York Bay or else gliding up the East River.

He did not lift his head, for by the action of the brutal crew they evidently were of the opinion that he was still in the unconscious state to which the blow with the oar had reduced him, and our hero was desirous that they should not learn the truth.

"For," reasoned the shrewd boy to himself, "if they think I'm stunned they will let me be until they reach whatever stopping place they are aiming for, but if they knew that I were conscious they might blindfold me, and I

should not know my way out when a chance for escape came. I wonder whether they got the girl——"

His wondering was cut short by hearing a little, half-stifled sob just in front of him, and turning his head ever so slightly, he made out the form of the girl he had tried to save from the clutches of the crew.

She was sitting between two of the oarsmen, her face buried in her hands, and her whole attitude speaking of misery and deepest dejection.

A rash idea entered Jack's head to make a quick movement, seize the girl in his strong arms, leap into the water, and then strike out for the nearest shore.

But a moment's reflection showed him the folly of this idea.

The crew rowed on steadily for a time, and then the boat was pointed toward shore, and in a short time was within a dozen yards of a long wharf on the New York side of the East River.

"Is it all clear?" asked a voice.

"Looks so," responded one of the crew, peering at the wharf. "Guess it's all O. K., cap'n."

"Take a long sight, and see that there's none o' them cursed peelers on the wharf," said the captain, who was the man whom Jack had knocked overboard.

The man looked long and carefully over the landing, but the place was deserted.

"It's all clear," he said.

"Then go ahead," said the captain. "No, hold on! Throw something over the girl's head, and shake the boy."

The man who was nearest to Jack bent over him.

Jack closed his eyes and scarcely allowed himself to breathe.

"Wake up, here," said the brute, seizing him by the hair and shaking him rudely, causing the boy so much pain that he came near screaming out aloud.

But he clinched his teeth tightly together and stood it, and the man gave him up.

"He's mum enough, cap'n. That was a heavy clip on the nob that he got, and it'll take a few hours to wear off."

"Then let him be," said the captain. "Throw a coat over the girl's head."

This was done, and the order given to pull away.

The boy gazed up through his half-closed eyelids and saw the pale stars; the moment after the boat glided slowly underneath the wharf, and for several yards was urged along with cautious strokes.

Suddenly it stopped, and one of the men gave utterance to a peculiar signal.

A moment later a subdued light crept over the murky waters, and the boat once more pursued its way, stopping

at length before a narrow passage, down which came the soft light.

The passage seemed to have been formed by removing part of the masonry upon which the pier or wharf stood. Water lay in the passageway to the depth of a foot, but the captain picked the girl up in his arms and strode through the wet roadway, while another of the crew lifted Jack up and followed suit.

In a moment they were in a small, underground abode, a cavernous-looking den, fit hiding place for criminals and human wharf rats.

Although it was summer time, a small fire of drift-wood burned on one side of the den, and over it stood a negress of gigantic stature. A wicked-looking creature she was, coarse, horrible in appearance, and apparently as strong as a lioness.

Jack was rudely dumped down on the hard, earthen floor, and the girl, after the coat was removed from her eyes, was seated near him.

Then Jack's bonds were taken off him by one of the more humane members of the band of thieves, for such in fact they were, and then the men walked out of the cave-like home, leaving the negress to prepare their supper.

As soon as they were gone, Jack sat up and looked around the place.

Then he turned to the girl and regarded her with admiration.

She was a fairy-like creature, of twelve or thirteen, with large, blue eyes, red lips that were as tempting as a cherry, wavy, golden hair, a clear, dazzling complexion, and was, in fact, a bewilderingly beautiful young girl.

The girl put forth a little white hand.

"I'm so sorry," she said, and to Jack's ears her voice sounded like silvery bells. "You tried to save me, and have been taken prisoner."

"I don't really think that I'm sorry," said the boy, taking the tiny hand in his own. "For you are here, and it will be so much pleasure to me to rescue you, as I certainly shall."

The girl blushed, while her eyes kindled with admiration for this plucky youth, who spoke so confidently of escape.

"What is your name?" she cried.

"Jack," replied our hero.

"Jack what?" queried the little miss.

"Only Jack."

"But you must have two names," positively declared the girl, holding up her hands in wonder, as though viewing some new-found curiosity. "Everybody has two names."

Jack gave her a brief outline of his history, and then asked her name.

"Pearl," was the reply. "Pearl Payson."

"What a pretty name!" exclaimed Jack. "And it seems to fit you."

"Yer a pooty pair, altogether," said a voice at their side. "But yer both looks as much out of place as a jimmy in a jeweler's show winder."

They turned to behold a tall, slim boy of fifteen or thereabouts standing near them. He was as thin and wiry as an eel, and his face expressed the usual amount of low cunning belonging to the street arabs, who grow sharp on hunger, and gather wisdom from kicks and blows.

Considerable humor was expressed in his shrewd face, and his tone was kindly as he addressed them.

"Who are you?" demanded Jack.

"I'm Muddler," was the reply.

"And what does Muddler mean?" asked the little miss.

"It means Muddler, I guess," was the satisfactory reply.

"And what are you?" asked Pearl.

"I'm a little snakesman." A slang term used by thieves to designate a boy whom they can slip through a cut pane when robbing a house. "And I'm high per coon at de biz."

"A little what?" cried Pearl.

"Snakesman," said Muddler.

Pearl turned to Jack.

"I don't know what it is," said our hero.

"Oh, yer both Irish," said Muddler, and then explained it to them.

"Thank you," said Jack. "Will you be kind enough to tell us where we are?"

"In course," said Muddler. "Yer under de Havana wharf."

"And where's the Havana wharf?"

"Here," said Muddler, trying to look simple and very much surprised.

Jack glanced up at the twinkling eyes of the snakesman, and could easily see that Muddler was poking fun at him by purposely misunderstanding him.

At that moment the sound of footsteps came to their ears, and Muddler immediately made himself scarce, while the gigantic colored woman, who had been an amused listener while the little snakesman was rattling on, now proceeded to dish up the victuals she had been cooking.

Soon after, the captain, followed by about a dozen villainous-looking brutes, came into the den and clamored loudly for supper.

The negress went to work, produced a table and some china from one corner, and soon everything was in readiness for the rude crowd.

Then the captain approached his two young prisoners.

"Well, my jolly reefer," he cried, looking at Jack, who returned his glance fearlessly, "how does your head feel?"

"Aches a little," truthfully replied the boy.

"You'll be all right when you get a supper down," said the leader, who was a coarse, thick-set, ruffianly-looking man, perhaps forty-five years of age. "You knocked me in the water and came near spoiling my little game; you got knocked in the head; that's just even. I don't hold any grudge against you, and you shouldn't hold any hard feelings against me."

"I don't," said Jack, wondering what the outlaw captain was driving at.

"That's right," heartily cried the captain. "Come and have some supper."

Jack was about to assent to the proposition when the captain chanced to glance at Pearl.

"Why, what a pretty darling she is," he said, aloud, and put forth his hand to stroke her beautiful hair.

But Pearl drew back indignantly.

"Oho!" laughed the captain. "It's a prudish little darling, is it? Well, then, we must kiss those prudish lips."

The villain made a step forward, and as he did so Jack got upon his feet.

As the leader attempted to seize the girl, she rushed past him, ducking swiftly under his arm, and in a moment lay trembling in Jack's embrace.

"Out of the way, you jackanapes!" cried the captain, and rushed upon the boy, but Jack's long right arm shot out like a flash and sent the thief rolling to the ground.

The men laughed heartily at the defeat of their leader, but the latter was thoroughly enraged.

He leaped to his feet, drew a knife from his pocket and rushed toward the brave boy, who still held Pearl in his protecting arms.

Some of the thieves darted forward and made a clutch at the arm of the maddened man; one of them cried:

"Do you want to hang? Remember, the girl is looking at yer!"

But the powerful brute threw them madly aside and rushed upon his victim; the cruel knife was raised on high, the hand of fate was about to descend, when a terrible and unearthly shriek rang out through the outlaw's den.

CHAPTER IV.

CAPT. FAULKNER.

In the parlor of a handsome uptown mansion in our city we come upon Mrs. Annie Payson and Capt. Frank Faulkner.

Mrs. Payson is a wealthy widow, and the mother of Pearl, Jack's companion in misfortune.

She is a handsome woman of thirty, with the blue eyes and blond hair of her daughter.

Capt. Faulkner is commander of the police boat *Causee*,

the vessel which came just too late to save pretty Pearl Payson from the hands of the river thieves.

He is the accepted lover of the handsome widow, and a man that any woman might well be proud to match with for life.

"You say that you have received a letter from the villains?" said the captain.

"Yes," replied the sorrowing lady, drawing from her pocket a not over-clean letter. "They have stolen her from me for the purpose of robbing me of a large sum of money. Read this letter."

Capt. Faulkner did so.

"MADAM: We have got your daughter, and we intend to keep her until you plank down the sum of twenty thousand dollars. You are rich, and can afford to throw away a little money without hurting yourself much, and we need the article very much, and, therefore, have seized upon your child. Your daughter will be well treated, but then you must remember that she is among a lot of rough men, and her pretty ears will be constantly shocked. If you are wise you will lose no time in inserting a 'personal,' stating your intentions. AD-
DUCTORS."

"Aha!" cried Faulkner. "So that is their little game. The rascal is smart enough to make you come to terms through a personal column, but we'll match him for all his smartness. Cheer up, Annie. I'm going to see our friend Dawson, and show him this letter. We must fight it out, and trust to our wits to gain the victory. Cheer up, my dear Annie, and you shall soon see your child again."

They kissed each other an affectionate good-by, and then Capt. Faulkner proceeded to Dawson's office.

He found the detective conversing with Sir Francis Clifton.

"Ah!" cried Dawson, "here is the very man that we want. Sir Francis Clifton, allow me to present you to Capt. Frank Faulkner, one of the most distinguished police officers in the service of the government."

"Sir Francis Clifton?" said Faulkner. "Why, then, you are the gentleman who was paying court to my sister some few months past—the Lady Lyle."

"You are right," said the nobleman, heartily shaking the captain by the hand, "and she will become my wife if I succeed in the mission which has brought me to this country."

"And what is the mission?"

"To discover, if possible, the lost heir to the title and estates of Lyle," replied the worthy baronet. "You came here with the very same motive."

"And failed," said Faulkner. "I searched the country from east to west, and from the north to the extreme south, and then gave up the task as hopeless. But I liked the country, and met and accustomed myself to dangers;

liked excitement and adventure, and soon associated myself with the police, and am now a captain in a branch of the service which brings me in contact with the most daring and expert thieves, the most deadly cutthroats and the most revengeful wretches in the world."

"A rather valuable ally," said Sir Francis, looking admiringly upon the fighting captain. "We shall be fortunate in having his aid."

"For your search?" asked Faulkner.

"Yes," replied the nobleman.

"And I shall want your aid along with our friend, Dawson," said Faulkner, drawing out the letter from the outlaw. "Read that."

The baronet and the detective carefully read the threatening letter, and then Dawson took it in his own hands and regarded it long and earnestly.

"That's right, Dawson. Look it over carefully; note the style of working out the game; and see if you cannot determine upon the hand that worked it up."

The detective spread out the letter on a table and pored over it for ten minutes.

Then going to a small safe that stood in one corner of the office, he drew forth a large packet of letters, all arranged in neatest order.

"Now we'll see whether I have any right to my license," he said, and rapidly sorting the package he drew forth an old letter and carefully opened it.

Then he opened the one Faulkner had brought him, and laid the two letters side by side on the desk.

"Look at them," he said, triumphantly.

The handwritings were exactly alike.

"They match!" cried the baronet.

"True!" said Faulkner. "Now, Dawson, if you name the writer I shall say that you are a true detective."

"But I don't know the writer," declared the thief-taker.

"What do you know, then?" demanded both of his friends.

"The dictator is known to me," triumphantly said Dawson.

"And who is he?"

"Barry McGrew."

"The most hardened villain on the three rivers," declared Faulkner.

"And the smartest one, too," declared Dawson.

"Do you know where to find him?" he added.

"Not exactly," was the reply, "but I know that he has a den somewhere in the vicinity of the Havana Wharf, and probably lives under a pier in true dock-rat style."

"That is satisfactory," said Dawson. "We can soon spy him out. Meanwhile, should we not put in a cautious personal, in order to gull the rascal into the idea that his victim will come to terms?"

"I will do that," said Faulkner.

"All right," said the detective. "Now, listen while I tell you what took place between my latest visitor and myself a few hours ago."

Then he narrated at length all that transpired during the recent call of Salty Sam, to which Faulkner listened attentively.

"Why," cried the quick-witted captain, "that's the boy you saw struck down. He, also, is in the hands of Barry McGrew."

"Exactly," said the detective. "But can you not see any deeper than that?"

"I cannot," said Faulkner.

"That's because you are only the fighting captain of a police boat," chaffingly said the smiling Dawson. "I am a detective, and as much of a thinker as you are a fighter, and can connect three cases where you connect but two."

"How?" demanded Faulkner.

"Yes, how?" echoed Sir Francis.

"By simply giving it as my firm opinion that the young Lord of Lyle, the lost heir for whom Sir Francis is searching, is also in the hands of Barry McGrew."

The detective's friends stared at him.

"Explain yourself," said the captain.

"I will," said Dawson. "Recall the items of my conversation with the old salt, and you must believe with me that the lad he speaks of is not his son. The age, sixteen, tallies with that of the stolen child. He is half fisherman and half sailor, and yet he can offer me fifty dollars to recover for him a son who is disobedient."

"Go on," said Faulkner. "Your reasoning is very sound."

"From fishing alone he could not well gather much money," continued Dawson. "Then I must infer he is paid for keeping the boy by the party who employed him to steal the young heir. It is evident that the party who is at the bottom of the whole business was either too humane or else too cowardly to have the child murdered, and merely wanted it out of the way; that is, if my theory be a correct one. From this we should reason that all the plotter wanted was to keep the heir out of the way for some purpose. It was also essential to this plotter that the child should not be allowed to go out in the world, or even live among an educated community, for then it might not be a long time before the lost heir would be found and identified by means of the birthmark——"

"Hold on," interrupted Faulkner. "That birthmark is the thing. I have forgotten what it was."

"It is a crimson cross," said Sir Francis Clifton. "On the boy's right shoulder will be found the mark."

"Go on," said Faulkner to Dawson.

"There is little more to say," rejoined the detective. "I have proved to you that my theory is not an empty one, so far as reason and common sense go, and I would like you

to express your opinion. You must admit that Staten Island is, at the part where this man lives, about as wild as any other spot within a hundred miles of New York, and would be just the place for a man to select who wished to live secluded, and yet wished to be within easy distance of a city, where such a man as this Stokes would want to come for a spree. Am I not right?"

"You are, decidedly," replied Faulkner; "and I heartily support your theory."

"And I," put in the baronet, "feel every minute more and more convinced that Dawson's theory is sound. Every argument he puts forth is based either on fact or sound judgment, and the whole thing appears so reasonable, that I am convinced as well as delighted, for if this Jack proves to be the heir, and I can restore him safely to his mother, it will make me the happiest man in the world."

"Then consider yourself happy," confidently asserted Dawson, "for I feel in my bones that we are in the right track."

"And my bones tell me that I am going to wipe Barry McGrew and his thieving band out of existence," said Capt. Faulkner, taking his hat from the desk. "I shall now arrange with my chief to allow me charge and full power in this case; attend to the personal, prepare my boat and my men for a hard tussle, and then proceed to hunt the villain down."

"And I shall go with you," said Sir Francis.

"So shall I," declared Dawson; "you are an excellent fighter, but you'll want my head to carry you through. Ah! talking about heads, what a short-sighted fool I've been!"

The baronet and Faulkner looked at him in surprise.

"What do you mean?" asked Faulkner.

"Just what I say," exclaimed Dawson. "We are short-sighted because we do not count on all the opposition that may meet us. There is one, powerful in all probability, whom we may have to battle with. Can't you both see that there is an important question to be asked and answered?"

They were both silent, and Dawson put the question:

"Who is the enemy of the stolen child?"

CHAPTER V.

LAURENCE LYLE.

When Salty Sam left the office of the detective, he walked away in the direction of a liquor saloon; but he had not gone over two blocks before a tall man of middle age, handsomely dressed, tapped him on the shoulder.

Salty wheeled around and faced this person, cast one glance at the man's dark eyes and strong face, and then exclaimed:

"The devil!"

"Very near, but not quite," said the other.

"Not a cussed way from it!" spluttered the half-intoxicated fisherman. "If the devil is any smarter'n you are, Salty Sam will stand a cussed poor chance!"

"Enough of this nonsense," cried the other, his satirical smile vanishing. "How is the boy?"

Salty Sam turned pale, and his knees fairly knocked together.

He tried to look away from the speaker, but the man had caught his eye, and he could not do anything but twist and squirm under the man's glance.

The man's hand slowly came down upon the shoulder of the shivering Stokes, who started as if stabbed.

"Brace up," said the distinguished-looking individual. "Come with me and have a glass of something strong to steady your nerves, and then tell me the worst."

"But I——" began Salty, when the other cut him short.

"Do you know who I am?" he demanded.

"Laurence Lyle," meekly returned Salty.

"And who am I?"

"My master," humbly said Stokes.

"Then be wise and obey me," sternly said Mr. Laurence Lyle. "Come and have a drink of rum."

Very obediently Salty went along with this commanding stranger. The latter conducted his trembling charge to a bar, sent a couple of drinks down the willing throat of the old salt, and then walked him off to a far corner of the room and seated him at a table.

"Now," said he, taking his seat by his side, "you will please tell me where the boy is."

"I don't know," shivered Salty Sam.

"What?" cried Lyle.

"Honor bright!" declared the fisherman.

"Sam Stokes," said Lyle.

"Present," said Salty.

"Do you know what'll happen to you in a short time if you do not tell me the entire truth?"

"You'll murder me, I expect," groaned Stokes.

"You know better than that," calmly said Lyle. "You know that I don't shed blood, or else you would not have been placed in charge——"

"I begs yer pardon," said Sam. "I'll tell yer the truth if yer'll promise not to blame me too much."

"Go on," said Lyle.

"Well, then," said Salty, "I never let him out o' my sight fer a day until yesterday, and then I'll be cursed if he didn't slip his cables and sail away from his snug moorin's, and I'm tryin'——"

"Stow your sailor lingo," impatiently put in Laurence Lyle. "Tell me the cause of the boy leaving you."

"Well, I wanted some blunt that the lad had 'arnt, an' he wouldn't gin it over to me. We had a muss; he knocked

me on my beam ends, rushed down into the water, cut my halyard, and went off in the old yawl without provisions, compass or oars."

"Plucky," commented Lyle.

"Oh," said Salty, "he's got as much pluck as a shark. But that ain't all."

"What more?"

Salty Sam looked cautiously around the room, and leaned forward so as to bring his mouth close to Lyle's ear.

"He stood and faced me yesterday when his blood was dancin', and he told me to my teeth that I wasn't his father!"

The listener started and grew pale, and his face expressed much surprise.

"Did he say that?"

"Nothin' less," asserted Salty. "An' what's worse than that, he said as how he had better blood in his veins nor what he could a got from me or old Sal, and the little reefer was plucky enough to give his opinion that I'd stole him."

"The devil!" gasped Laurence Lyle.

"Worse nor the devil!" asserted Salty.

"You have been blabbing——"

"Master," interrupted Salty; "I've got some faults, but I never splits on——"

"Fool!" cried Lyle, interrupting the other in turn. "I was going to say that you've been blabbing in your sleep!"

Salty became thoughtful.

"I never knowed it," he said. "And Sal never spoke on it to me. I kin swear as how she don't gab at night."

"But how else could he have got any such alarming notions in his head?" demanded the other.

"I gives it up," said Salty, "unless it's his blood that does the blabbin'."

"But isn't he ignorant?"

"Well, no," admitted Salty. "Yer see, I couldn't keep watch over him all the time, and when he slipped his cables and went to school I couldn't stop him."

"Why not?"

"The people ain't got much to talk about roun' there, an' if I'd bore across his course they'd talk about that. When there's any talk people open their eyes a little, an' it was bad policy to attract attention."

"Very true," assented Lyle. "But you should have been more prudent. With education to bring out the wit which he had inherited from his father and mother, he may prove a bad enemy for us to conquer, now that he has got such ideas in his brain. But we'll have him back yet!"

CHAPTER VI.

SAVED—THE PLAN OF ESCAPE.

Again that horrible, unearthly scream, seeming to come from all corners of the cavern-like den, echoed and rolled through the house of the outlaws, and every cheek grew pale with the horror inspired by the wild, unnatural sounds.

The knife dropped from the palsied hand of the captain, and his hot anger gave place to cold dismay.

Jack's life was saved.

For a few moments silence reigned throughout the den; the giant negress had dropped to the floor, and was holding her apron over her head; some of the ruffian crew were leaning against the walls for support, while others were seated upon the boxes which served for chairs.

Perhaps Jack was the least frightened of all present, but still the blood had seemed to congeal around his young heart when those awful screams pierced his ears. As for Pearl, she had nestled fairly inside the jacket of her brave young protector, and lay trembling in his arms.

The leader soon recovered his courage, and his voice rang out:

"Search through the den!"

He caught up one of the heavy lamps that illuminated the den.

"Follow your leader," he said. And, backed by his men, he walked to the fore end of the cavernous retreat and opened a rudely made door which Jack had not seen before.

This conducted them into a square room, apparently of solid masonry, which contained boxes, barrels and bales in goodly number.

The river thieves searched through this storeroom, but found nothing that could give them the clew to the source of the strange, mysterious scream.

"It's mighty funny," said Barry McGrew, "and it makes me feel deuced uncomfortable. If it's anybody in our den it may ruin us, and if it isn't a body, what can it be?"

"A soul!" suggested a superstitious one.

"A soul!" echoed the captain.

"Yes, a lost soul!" whispered the man who was still shaking from his recent scare. "It may be the soul of some dock rat what has got a lot of blood on his hands, and so he can't rest in his grave."

The others shivered and glanced nervously around them.

"You're a fool!" impatiently spoke up Barry McGrew. "Let's go back and take a good, stiff horn of whiskey, and then we'll be right side up again. I'm glad it's happened, anyhow."

"Why?" asked his second in command, a bushy young thief, who had been born within the walls of a prison, and drew in the air of crime with his first breath. "What is there to be glad about?"

"T'd 'a' killed the boy," said the captain.

"Ay!" said the lieutenant, "and then you'd 'a' been forced to kill the girl, or else chance to put a noose around your neck, and so we'd 'a' been twenty thousand dollars out. I hollered to you about the girl."

"And I heard you," said Barry McGrew; "but my blood was in my head when I gripped my knife, and nothing but just such a thing as has happened could have prevented me from striking the little devil dead. Now that I am over my passion, I only admire him for his rare grit, and am determined to coax him into the gang. He'll prove a trump card for us."

The outlaws now seated themselves around the captain, and the latter poured out enormous drinks of fiery liquor for the thieves, which were swallowed down as bodily as so much water.

A brimming glass of the powerful liquor was handed to Muddler by the captain. The little snakesman gravely took it, placed his lips to the potent draught, and when Barry McGrew turned his head away the boy dexterously threw it over his shoulder, and the noise of the drunken ditties drowned the splash of the scattered whiskey.

He then handed up his empty glass to the captain and asked for more.

"You'll get dru-n-k!" hiccupped the captain.

"Never yer mind," said Muddler. "Give me a fair share, old man."

Thereupon Barry McGrew filled up the tumbler and Muddler again went through the farce of drinking.

"I told him he'd get drunk," mumbled out the captain of the thieves, as Muddler fell over on his side and appeared to pass off into a drunken slumber. "The kid wants bracin', he wants bracin', wants bra-c——"

And then the worthy Barry McGrew had taken his departure for the land of Nod.

Jack and Pearl still occupied the place where they had first rested themselves. The negro had brought them food. Older persons might have refused the food, but these were healthy young people and devoured it with a good appetite.

It was with feelings of great concern that Jack watched the heavy drinking of the thieves, for he knew that the effect of liquor would be to make them wild and lawless, and he feared for the beautiful creature at his side.

One by one the robbers dropped off into drunken slumber.

Jack observed Muddler tumbling over with an empty glass clutched in his hand, and he felt a great deal of pity for such a weak-minded lad.

Soon all sounds except the loud snoring of the outlaws had died away. The huge Chloe, her black face drooping on her breast, was nodding before the fire, and Jack

thought himself to be the only one in the den who was not asleep.

He was quickly undeceived.

Muddler cautiously raised his head.

The little snakesman glanced around him with a slow turn of his head, and beheld all but our hero slumbering.

Then the little fellow got upon his feet and looked toward the prisoners, who were separated from him by twenty feet of ground, strewn with the loudly snoring outlaws.

Cautiously Muddler, with light feet, stepped over the prostrate forms.

In a few seconds he was standing beside the prisoners. Jack looked at him inquiringly.

"Well?" he said.

"I've come ter see yer," said Muddler. "Will yer talk?"

"Certainly," said Jack, wondering what this odd fish was driving at.

"Bully," said Muddler, taking a seat on the hard ground beside the boy and girl. "Now I wants ter know if they lets people be honest arter they've onct been on the cross?"

"Eh?" said Jack.

"Don't yer twig?" asked the little snakesman.

"No," said Jack, who had learned what "twig" meant by hearing Salty Sam use the slang phrase.

"What, don't yer twig?" asked Muddler.

"On the cross. What does that mean?"

"Not bein' on de square," was the little snakesman's very simple reply.

Jack understood him.

"Of course they'll let you be honest," said our hero.

"Ay, they'll help you in every way if they see that you are trying to keep on the right road. Do you think that you would like to try it?"

"I've a hankerin' that way," admitted Muddler.

"Then try to get away from the society of these vile men," advised Jack. "If I can escape I will join my fortunes to yours, and help you to become a good, honest man."

The little snakesman put forth his puny hand.

"Put it there," he said, and there was a tear standing in his eye. "Yer the kind o' cap'n what I could foller on any sort of a log."

Jack grasped the outstretched hand of the faithful little fellow, and felt that he had spoken true. He knew that hereafter he had a faithful friend and a devoted companion, and he began to think that there was some wise forethought in the chance which had thrown him into the midst of the outlaw band.

Pearl also gravely gave him her hand, and the little snakesman took it as gingerly as if it were a snowflake.

"I will aid you by every means in my power, and if

you are tempted to steal through being poor or hungry, come to me and I will give you all that you need. There, don't thank me, for I haven't done anything yet. Are we going to escape?"

"We kin try," said Muddler.

"Have you formed a plan?" asked Pearl.

"Yes," said Muddler.

"Out with it," commanded Jack; "but speak as low as you can, for fear of being overheard by some who are not sound asleep."

Muddler's plan was simple, but good.

"I'll creep out to de passage and see dat de boat is all hunk, and den I kin see if de cap'n left a feller on guard. He usually does.

"Den we kin take suthin' heavy like a club, if de passage is guarded, knock down de guard, jump into de boat and away we goes."

"That'll do," said Jack.

"When will you begin?" asked Pearl.

"Now!" said Muddler.

"I'll go down the passage now along with you," said Jack to Muddler. "The guard may be asleep; if he is awake we can put him out of the way. I've got a knack of hitting rather heavily from the shoulder, and if I can crowd up within arm's length of the man, I'll engage that he'll not prevent our escape."

"Bully for young Ameriky," murmured the little snakesman. "I know yer a peeler. Foller."

"Hold on," said Jack. "Are we going to leave Pearl here?"

"Yes."

"And come back after the coast is clear?"

"Yes."

"But I want to say before I start that if I can't carry her away I won't try to make my escape alone," said Jack.

"If an alarm sounds you may paddle away out into the river, but I am going to stick to Pearl."

"Dat's hunky," said the Muddler. "But where you goes, I goes. If yer makes for de water, water for me; if yer makes for de den, I'm dere."

"I don't doubt but that you're faithful enough," said Jack. "I only wanted you to understand my intentions. To know just exactly what your leader intends to do is very often valuable knowledge."

So Muddler soon ascertained.

With cautious tread the little snakesman conducted his companion along the slimy passage. It was slow work to crawl along over the ground, scarcely daring to breathe, but at length the sharp eyes of the snakesman made out the motionless form of the guard.

The man was leaning up against the wall of stone, as motionless as a marble statue. Muddler thought that he

must be sleeping standing up. but the guard dispelled the idea by coughing slightly.

"Do you see him?" whispered Muddler.

"Yes," said Jack.

"Think yer can knock him?"

"Yes, I do."

"Den crawl up to him."

All this was said in a low, whispering tone, which could not be heard three feet off. Jack noiselessly removed his coat and prepared for business.

He worked his way along over the clayey soil with a gliding, snakelike movement, and in a few minutes was directly in the rear of the guard.

Slowly his bowed form rose up behind the unconscious robber, until the boy stood erect, two feet from his foe.

Then the boy's strong right hand was clinched, the fist was drawn back until the ball-like fingers were against his right shoulder; then, with a snapping sound from the elbow joint, the fist shot out with lightning speed and landed fairly under the left ear of the guard.

The man fell as though struck with the force of a falling beam; not a murmur, not a groan, but without a sound the guard fell at the feet of his victorious boy enemy.

"Ain't he high per coon!" cried Muddler.

Nothing could have delighted the snakesman more than to witness such a feat.

"Come on," cried the young hero, "we must tie him up somehow."

"I prepared for dat," said Muddler, drawing forth a stout piece of rope.

The light was very imperfect, but it was sufficient for their purpose.

In a few seconds the stunned sentinel was bound and gagged.

"Now for Pearl," said Jack.

The young captain led the way back to the den.

"Have you done it?" whispered Pearl.

"Yes," said Jack, "and we can escape."

"Wait a jiffy," said Muddler. "We'll want some chink, and I'll take some from de cap'n."

He walked softly across the floor toward the sleeping leader.

Barry McGrew was slumbering heavily.

The adroit snakesman inserted his hand into the vest pocket of the captain.

McGrew moved slightly.

Muddler withdrew his hand.

The captain drew a long, uneasy breath, and then went off into a fresh key.

Muddler waited a moment to allow McGrew time to settle deeply into slumber.

Pearl, who was trembling from head to foot with ex-

citement, took a seat upon a low stool near the sleeping Chloe.

Jack stood near the passage, ready to lead the escape as soon as Muddler was through with McGrew.

Again the little snakesman insinuated his slim fingers into the pockets of Barry McGrew.

This time he withdrew them with several bills tightly grasped between his steady fingers.

He made a sign to Jack to go ahead, and our hero had taken a single step forward when, just as Pearl arose from the stool on which she had been sitting the negress awoke.

"Hi, dar," yelled the giantess, "what yer t'ink yer's about?"

Then she leaped forward and grasped the trembling girl by the hair, just as several of the ruffian crew started abruptly from their slumbers.

Muddler's course of action was decided upon in a moment.

He knew that Pearl could not escape, and he also knew that Jack would not go off without her, so to escape all chance of blame or suspicion of being connected with the affair, he put into execution a neat game that had occurred to him upon the instant.

Pushing forward like a deer, he sped past the astonished thieves, and hurled himself upon Jack.

"Don't mind what I do."

This was shot into Jack's ear as Muddler grasped him around the body and hurled him to the ground. Our hero comprehended the idea, and when he was down, pretended to struggle violently.

"No, yer don't my kiddy," roared Muddler, for the benefit of the captain and lieutenant, who now came up to the spot. "Yer kin kick, and yer kin scratch, but yer can't get out of dis 'spectable s'ciety while I'm around."

And the lieutenant, well pleased with the snakesman, said:

"Muddler, you'll soon be a captain."

"The thieves now tied Jack very securely to one of the gang and went back to their slumbers, while Muddler took advantage of the chance to whisper to Jack:

"I'm free, so cheer up, my kiddy!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE FIGHT.

Capt. Faulkner's arrangements were soon put in satisfactory order, and on the afternoon following the escape of our hero from Salty Sam, the *Causee*, with her usual number of officers on board, steamed around into the East River and lay off Havana Wharf, sometimes going up the river a short distance and sometimes going down, but continually keeping in telescopic range of the several wharfs which Faulkner suspected of concealing his old enemy.

With the fearless captain in his pilot house were Sir Francis Clifton and the ever cool and collected Dawson.

The detective was probably the most eager of the three to have the matter in hand come to a decided issue, for then the soundness of his long-headed opinion would, perhaps, be proved.

He felt assured that his guess was a true one, and ardently longed for the moment when he could triumphantly point to the crimson cross on the arm of Jack, the fisherman's boy, and proudly say:

"Didn't I tell you so?"

But he was forced to curb his impatient longing, and although the line of wharves was kept under surveillance until darkness settled over the river, nothing suspicious had been noted.

"I am satisfied that he is around these wharves," said Faulkner.

"So am I," said Dawson.

"Then I shall stay here until I spot the rascal," said Faulkner. "I have a powerful calcium light prepared, one of more than ordinary brilliancy, and it shall be ready to flash out in a moment; I'll keep spying with my night glass from time to time, and shall hail anything suspicious."

"And if they don't answer?"

"Then the calcium light will soon show me what they are," said Faulkner.

While everything was being prepared for his reception, sure enough, Capt. Barry McGrew came out of his lair.

He came in a large boat, rowed by a dozen hardy brutes, who liked fighting fully as much as they did stealing, which is saying a great deal.

They rowed across the river a short distance, and one of the crew said:

"Steady!"

"What's up!" asked the captain.

Every man was listening, with dripping oars apeak.

"Good news," said the fellow who had given the order.

"There's the *Causee*."

"Where?"

"Straight ahead a few hundred yards," replied the man.

"That fishing smack that comes atween helps to hide our small craft from them, but I know the *Causee* by the cut of her jib, if she does go by steam."

Barry McGrew turned to his crew.

"Boys!"

"All attention," came from the gang.

"The *Causee*, with that cursed Frank Faulkner, has always been the worst enemy we've had on the three rivers."

"That's true, cap'n."

"You all know that she don't carry more'n a dozen men."

"Yes."

"And that they certainly can't be looking for danger extra sharp."

"Yes, cap'n."

"So I propose that, as there is enough of us to tackle 'em, we creep up, take 'em by surprise, and give 'em a lesson that'll last."

"Bully for the cap," said one.

"Can we surprise 'em?" asked another.

"Our oars are muffled in the rowlocks, it's dark as the devil, and I don't see why we can't do it," said McGrew. "I want to give Faulkner a shaking up that'll last him a lifetime. Will you do it, lads?"

"We will," came from the crew, who were all hardened and desperate.

"Then prepare for hot work," said McGrew. "We may have to do it all in five minutes or so, and then cut our sticks away. Have every revolver cocked and every knife loose enough to pull easily. All ready?"

"Ready," came from the crew.

"Give away," said the outlaw leader. "Pull slow and quick and we'll pounce upon them like vultures on their prey."

With measured strokes the river thieves pulled around the fishing smack that partially hid them from the view of those on board of the police boat.

When the space between them and the little steamer was all clear water the crew pulled swiftly and had almost shot up to within reach of the *Causee's* chains when a startling hail rang out:

"Boat ahoy!"

"Pull, and jump on board," commanded Barry McGrew, and at that instant a dazzling glare from the *Causee* flashed over the water.

"Quick, into the chains and onto the deck!" cried Barry McGrew. "Throw the painter around the fluke."

In a trice the order was obeyed; the rope was attached to the bow anchor, the men leaped on deck, and the fireman who met the view of the ruffian horde was shot down in his tracks.

Like the clear tones of a trumpet Capt. Faulkner's voice rang out in command.

With Sir Francis Clifton and the detective at his side, and a dozen trustworthy officers at his back, he rushed upon deck.

At the same instant that he appeared the strong light was trained so as to bear full upon the river thieves, and while they were in the full glare of the powerful blaze, their enemies were in the shadow.

The outlaws unhesitatingly discharged their weapons, and cries of pain plainly told that some of the bullets had found a living mark.

"Fire!" rang out from Capt. Faulkner's lips, and as he gave the order he leveled his revolver full at the head of

his hated enemy, Barry McGrew, and, taking a quick aim, fired.

One of the gang made a desperate spring forward at the instant that Faulkner pulled the trigger, and the bullet destined to let out a human life sent him to his long account.

"Fire again, and then jump in the boat and cut away," cried Barry McGrew, who had met with a much warmer reception than he had expected. "They're too much for us. Fire!"

His men obeyed, and an answering volley cut down another thief.

"Jump for the boat!"

McGrew shouted out the order and quickly turned to leap into the craft which he had so unwisely quitted.

"Charge!" cried Faulkner. "Don't let them escape."

At the head of his men the gallant captain of the *Causee* rushed down the bloody deck, just at the moment when the roughs began tumbling into their boat.

Barry McGrew was always the last man to leave the post of danger.

He stood erect by the bow, grasping a large revolver in his hand.

The charge of the brave Faulkner brought him within the blaze of the calcium light.

As soon as the gallant captain appeared, Barry McGrew's right hand was thrown up and his revolver pealed forth a whiplike crack.

Then the leader of the river thieves dropped into his boat and made off, while the noble Faulkner fell to the deck.

"Pull like the devil!" roared McGrew, as he seized the rudder. "I knocked that cursed Faulkner over with a neat shot, but they may pursue us for all that. Give way, my lads, or you may sleep to-night in a stone jug."

The crew, three less in number than before the short but sharp fight had taken place, pulled with a will, and their leader guided the boat under the wharf.

In a few moments it was secured near the long passage-way, and the sentinel who had been left behind reported everything serene.

"That's good," said Barry McGrew. "I had begun to think that there was no end to our streak of bad luck. Our captive comes near getting off as soon as we get her, we're all scared out of our wits by a mysterious scream, a sentinel is mysteriously attacked, and afterward we find him bound and gagged. I begin to think there's something wrong about the place."

Thus talking the outlaw captain reached the den, and then a string of horrible curses came from his lips, and his followers soon echoed his deep oaths.

On the floor of the den lay Chloe, the negress, sense-

less, bound and gagged, and for greater security, tied to a ring in the wall.

Jack, Pearl and Muddler had disappeared.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE MANIAC.

When Barry McGrew left the captives to go and meet defeat from Capt. Faulkner, he thought he did wisely to let Muddler remain with them, deeming them safe while under the sharp eye of the little snakesman.

The negress was left peacefully smoking her pipe by the fire.

As soon as the outlaws were well off, Muddler crossed over to the captives and entered into conversation with them.

Pearl was very much dejected.

Jack was full of pluck and hope.

"We must make another attempt to-night," said the snakesman. "It wouldn't hurt for us to try it while de cap'n is gone. What do yer say?"

"I say let's try it," said Jack. "We are both well armed, there are only this woman here and the guard in the passage to contend with, and surely we ought to be able to put them out of our path. To be sure, the negress is not to be sneezed at."

"Dat's where yer head's level," said Muddler, glancing at the form of the giantess. "If she gits her paws on yer once, yer might as well reckon as how yer goose is cooked."

"But we can manage her somehow," said Jack, regarding the immense cook attentively. "Suppose you rush up and butt her in the stomach."

Muddler laughed.

"I'll try it," he said, and just at that very instant the muffled report of pistols, sharp cracks which were deadened by contact with the massive walls, came to their ears.

The boys looked at each other.

"What is it?" said Jack.

"Popguns," returned Muddler.

"Yes, I know that, but what do you think it means?"

"I kin only guess," said Muddler.

"And what can you guess?"

"That it's cops shooting dock rats," replied the snakesman.

"Shooting at rats?" said the surprised Jack. "In the name of wonder, what do they want to waste powder and ball on the little things for? They can't clean the race out. I shouldn't think that they'd be able to see a rat at nighttime clearly enough to shoot at it."

Muddler laughed outright.

"You don't mean those human dock rats, do you?" put in Pearl.

"Course I does," said Muddler. "Jack didn't twig."

"Then who can be out there shooting but some one who has been put on Pearl's track?"

The question came from Jack.

"It may be Capt. Faulkner," said Pearl, and in a few minutes she explained who Faulkner was.

"No doubt, then, but that it is your friend," cried Jack. "Now is the time for us to make our escape from this den, for if we can only reach the open river we can count upon aid and protection. Come on, Muddler, draw your pistol. If the old wench moves upon us we'll be forced to shoot her down."

They had taken a few steps toward the dark passage before the negress heard them.

Then she looked up, and immediately gave utterance to her usual ear-splitting shout of remonstrance.

"Hi, dar, what am yer about?"

Seeing that the retreating ones would not heed her, she seized a large rolling pin and started toward them.

Jack and Muddler both cocked their weapons, for they had resolved to show the old wretch no mercy.

But something unforeseen occurred.

That terrible shriek that had once spread terror throughout the robber crew, again pealed forth, echoing in horrid cadence from wall to wall.

The cry, dismal, weird, blood-curdling, checked the footsteps of the negress, and her cheeks assumed a greenish hue.

A second chilling scream echoed through the den, and then the ponderous Chloe fell senseless to the floor.

At that same instant the door at the end of the den, the one connecting with the storeroom of the thieves, was thrown open.

In the doorway stood a strange figure which arrested the attention of the escaping prisoners.

There stood a man who seemed to be fully threescore and ten by the extreme whiteness of his long beard and flowing locks, and yet the form of the stranger was as erect as that of a forester. Though his clothes were shabby, dirty and well worn, there was something grand and imposing in the poise of his fine head, something impressive in the commanding attitude of the tall form.

But a glance at the flaming black eyes which lit up the stranger's features told a sad story. At one moment those really handsome eyes were vacant and without expression, and then again they would light up with a flashing fire—the fierce glare of insanity.

The man was a maniac.

To look at him made Muddler shiver; and as for Pearl, she looked the other way, and clung nervously to Jack's arm. Our hero did not feel the least fear, however, and stood a moment regarding the maniac.

Then he spoke, and even his voice caused Muddler and Pearl to jump.

"Who are you?" he asked.

The maniac regarded him with a fixed stare for a moment.

"So like, so very like," he murmured.

Jack repeated his question.

"Your friend," was the very sane reply, and the maniac's voice, hollow, deep and ringing, sounded kindly as he spoke the words which went to Jack's heart.

"And do you come to aid us?" continued our hero.

"I do," answered the old man. "Follow me, and I will lead you to the street. You may safely trust me, boy, for I saved your life not long ago. He stood above you with a gleaming dagger aimed for your heart; I looked upon your face, it spoke to me of one I knew long ago, and I sent forth a cry that stayed the assassin's hand. Ay! a face that I remember, a face of the dim long ago."

The maniac relapsed into a train of thought as he ceased to speak, and for the time being was totally oblivious to all that was occurring around him.

Jack turned to Muddler.

"Shall we go with him?"

"Course," said the little snakesman. "He's as looney as a cat, but he kin tote yer out of dis in no time; bet yer sweet life he kin. Dere is a way out through to South Street, but de cap'n could never find it out. Let's tie up de cook; fix her so she can't alarm de guard, and den follow where de looney old coon leads."

"All right," said Jack.

In less than five minutes the negress was secured in the manner described in the previous chapter, and then the three young people approached the musing old man, who was still plunged deeply in silent thought.

Jack touched him on the arm.

"We are ready, sir," he said.

The maniac started and turned his burning eyes upon the boy.

His gaze softened as it rested on the handsome face of our hero, and his voice was soft and gentle as he said:

"How like, how like, but he is at the bottom of the sea, and that is why I linger ever by the gloomy waters. His soul will some day seek for a place of shelter, and then he will come to this spot. I shall see him, shall know him, shall gaze upon his face, clasp him to my arms as I have not done for all these long, weary years, and he will stay with me forever."

"Dat's jes' de way Whalley talks at de Old Bowery Theatre," whispered Muddler to Jack.

"Hush!" whispered Jack, who, why he could not have told himself, was delighted to hear the maniac speak.

"Dat's all right," persisted Muddler. "But yer see dere is a good deal of wallerable time bein' wasted."

"Forgive me, you are right," said Jack, as he was recalled to the perilous and uncertain condition of affairs by the sensible little snakesman. "Will you lead on, sir?"

This was said to the maniac, who pressed his hand to his brow and said:

"Yes; come on."

He drew them inside the storeroom, and then carefully closed the door.

Then he produced a bull's-eye lantern, turned back the slide and let on a flood of light that glanced upon the wall to the right. Toward this wall the maniac picked his way with careful steps, threading in and out among boxes, barrels and bales, with which the storeroom was crowded, and after him came the eager trio, wondering by what means they would gain the open street.

The maniac placed his hand upon the wall of solid masonry, ran it quickly over the surface as though reaching for a hidden spring, and then pressed heavily when his hand rested on a certain spot.

A large stone slowly swung outward and revealed a dark cavity large enough to admit of a man passing through.

"Go on!" said the maniac, pointing to the dark hole, into which the rays of his powerful lantern shed a faint illumination. "I must close the trap."

It was a thing that made one feel very much as though he were jumping out of the frying pan into the fire, to thus obey the orders of a maniac and blindly pass through the secret stone door, but Jack was as brave as a lion, and unhesitatingly leaped through the dark orifice.

Muddler would have followed him into the mouth of a cannon.

He handed the agitated Pearl up to Jack, who assisted her over, and then the nimble little snakesman vaulted after his young friends.

The old man then followed after, and as he stepped on to the ground at their side, the stone swung into its place as noiselessly as a well-oiled door.

Our friends soon found themselves in a sort of huge rabbit burrow, winding in and out much the same as a rabbit forms his road. The sides, top and floor of the passage were all battened earth, and with only the lantern's rays to light up the gloomy place, it was very dismal indeed.

Through this passage the old man conducted them, and for minutes they kept winding in and out on the deviating

course. Then the old man came to a sudden stop, although the passage had not ended.

Above them was a rude trapdoor, visible when the light was brought to bear upon it, and at this portion of the route the passage had narrowed down so much that the trapdoor could be reached with the hand.

The maniac picked up a stout cudgel from the ground, pushed the trapdoor upward and caught at a stout rope that fell from above as soon as the trap moved up.

The maniac grasped this rope firmly, braced his feet against the side of the passage and quickly drew himself up.

The girl was handed up to him, the boys followed on the rope, and by the light of the lantern found that they were in a large cellar, littered with the rubbish that had accumulated for years.

The rope which had aided them was tied to a staple in the wall. A pair of rude stairs conducted them up to a basement, and thence the basement steps would lead them to the street.

The maniac closed the cellar door, and with deliberate motion pointed to the door which led out to the steps; the key was in the lock; Jack turned it, and in a moment he was breathing the free air.

Up the steps went Jack, with Pearl clinging fondly to his arm, and Muddler bringing up the rear, with a triumphant grin on his shrewd face. The maniac stood motionless in the doorway of the basement, gazing after the retreating forms with a sad light in his large, black eyes.

"So like," he murmured, "so very like!"

Meanwhile Jack was standing in South Street with his companions, not knowing just what to do or where to go, when a hand fell heavily on his shoulder, and an exultant voice cried out in his ears:

"Caught, my jolly reefer!"

He looked up in the face of Salty Sam.

CHAPTER IX.

SEPARATED.

When Jack's eyes rested upon the face of his self-constituted parent, his heart gave a great leap; it was startling at first, but he soon quieted down.

"What do you mean by caught?" he cried out, facing Salty Sam with a dauntless look on his dark, decided face. "Do you mean that you've caught me?"

"That's summat like it," said Salty, not a little astonished at the boy's coolness and courage.

"And what are you going to do with me now that you have caught me?" went on our plucky hero.

"Take you home," growled Salty.

"Take a reef in your tackle right there!" said Jack, adopting the old fisherman's half-sailor lingo. "You're running on breakers at ten knots, and you'll keel in just about two minutes. Just consider that I've had a bottle of wine smashed over my figurehead; that I'm out on life's ocean as a full-rigged clipper, rakish, and that I'm only going to strike my colors to a seventy-four! If you don't want to get plunked square amidships, I advise you to port your helm and tack to starboard. We, my consorts and myself, mount a few guns, and we never give up the ship."

By this time Salty Sam began to gain a true idea of the condition of things within our hero's mind; the boy had been passing through danger; was braver and more manly than ever; felt the charm and sweetness of his newly acquired independence, and would not resign it to go back to the old life without making a desperate struggle.

The dirty street was deserted, except for a few drunken sailors who were rolling up and down the line of vile grog-shops that constitute the main business of the thoroughfare.

Salty Sam made up his mind that he might as well have the thing out now as any time; the matter must be settled, and the present was as good a time as any. The boy must go back to Staten Island with him, and if it was necessary to fight for him, he would fight.

Having decided upon his course of action, the burly fisherman suddenly grasped the young snakesman in one hand and Pearl Payson in the other, and with an effort threw them a dozen feet away from him; then he quickly seized Jack by the throat.

Our hero had not believed the old salt capable of such quickness, and now he was fairly in the power of his enemy; the old fisherman held him firmly by the throat and looked fiercely at him.

"Now, you young ruffian!" he growled, "will you tell me to take a reef in my tackle? I feel jes' as if I could shut down on yer and choke the life out o' yer. Answer me this minute; will yer go peaceably home with yer daddy, or shall I throw yer to the carrion?"

Jack gasped out something.

"What do yer say?" grumbled Salty, letting up a little on the boy's throat just as one of the Belt Line cars came around a corner not far off. "Will yer gin in?"

At this moment the half-stunned Muddler got upon his feet, and put his hand to his head in a half-dazed, puzzled sort of style.

Pearl had struck against a railing, her head coming in contact with the iron and she was insensible.

"Gin in!" cried Salty, violently shaking the boy; but before Jack could say a word, the little snakesman leaped on the old fisherman and twined his long, slender fingers around Salty's throat.

At that moment the car rumbled by at a good speed, a man leaped off the platform and came swiftly toward them.

His eyes rested upon the three struggling forms, and Muddler, meeting the man's glances, saw that it was one of Barry McGrew's ruffian gang.

The thief made a step forward, as if about to take a hand in the fight, and as he did so his gaze rested upon the senseless form of the girl.

He rushed toward her, picked her up from the ground, threw her over his shoulder, and made off with the poor girl down the long pier, leaving Jack and Muddler struggling with their foe.

Muddler closed down desperately upon Salty Sam's throat, and the latter was forced to release Jack.

He did so, and then attempted to kick the little snakesman in order to get free from the long, wiry fingers, but Muddler held on with a death grip, and would have made sure work of the fisherman had not the loud rattle of a policeman's locust admonished him of approaching danger.

He let go his hold, and Salty Sam was glad enough to make his escape up the street.

Muddler's natural instincts, added to his training and experience, caused him to look upon any policeman as his natural enemy.

He clutched the half strangled Jack by the arm, and dragged him behind a line of huge casks.

The policeman came by, peering at everything around him, and soon passed beyond the two boys.

Jack recovered his breath, which had been very nearly shut off forever by the hand of the burly old fisherman.

His first question was:

"Where is Pearl?"

"I don't know for sure," replied Muddler. "I seen her lying beyond these here barrels when I picked meself up, and when I was climbin' that old buffer, one o' Barry McGrew's gang came up, took one squint at me, and that was the last I seed o' him."

"Then he must have seen Pearl, and has carried her off into captivity again," groaned the boy.

"Which I thinks yer right," said Muddler.

"What shall we do?" exclaimed Jack.

"Got any money?" asked Muddler.

"About thirty dollars," said Jack.

"Holy Smoke!" cried Muddler. "Let's go and have a blowout."

"A what?"

"Sumthin' ter eat," explained Muddler.

"But Pearl?" said Jack.

"I'm with yer like a brick," said the little snakesman; "but what kin yer do on an empty stummick?"

Jack reflected.

"Come on, then," he said, and along with his faithful friend struck off in the direction of the Bowery. "We'll get something to eat, provide ourselves with everything necessary and then we'll rescue Pearl Payson from that gang."

"Hunky boy!" said Muddler.

The two boys soon reached the Bowery under the guidance of the experienced Muddler, and for the first time in his life Jack entered an eating house.

The ragged appearance of his companion excited the laughter of some of the more aristocratic patrons, and the waiter did not care to serve them until Jack promptly laid down a dollar under the fellow's nose.

The two young gentlemen then put away a very good supper. Their bill was paid, and then they left the saloon.

Jack felt in his pocket.

His weapons were gone, and Muddler, in searching his pockets, found only his knife.

"We must have weapons, and very good ones, too," said Jack.

"Yer right," said Muddler. "Come up along Chatham Square and yer kin git 'em as good as new for half price."

"How do you know?" demanded Jack. "Did you get them for that?"

"Well, no," candidly admitted Muddler; "to tell yer the truth, I borrowed 'em when de man wasn't dere."

Jack laughed heartily at this mode of explaining a theft, and Muddler led off to a cheap place where Jack bought a pair of good revolvers, with plenty of cartridges, for a small sun.

"Do you know the way into the den?" he asked of his comrade.

"Certainly," said the snakesman. "We must git a boat, an' den I kin paddle yer right up to de guard; we kin knock him on de head, chuck him out o' de way, and den sneak up to de den. Den we must wait for an opportunity."

"And we will get it," said Jack. "I'll rescue Pearl Payson or die fighting for her."

CHAPTER X.

PEARL PAYSON.

Barry's follower seized the senseless girl while Jack and Muddler were battling with Salty Sam, bore her easily down the pier, crossed to the next by a connecting plank and stood safely on the wharf which sheltered Barry McGrew and his thieving horde.

A boat was lying in the water close to the shore. The thief picked up a piece of pine which would do service as a paddle, threw it into the boat and then leaped in after it with Pearl Payson in his arms. Even this shock did not bring the girl to consciousness. The force with which she had come in contact with the iron rail had been great, as could have been seen by the dark bruise upon her marble-like forehead.

It was but the work of a moment for the ruffian to put the girl in the boat and send it up under the dark wharf with the end of the pine stick, and in a moment he was in darkness.

Paddling carefully along with his primitive oar, the river thief slowly advanced up the dark roadway.

Soon a voice cried:

"McGrew!"

"Barry!" instantly added the thief, to whom the two words constituted the password of the gang.

"Come along!" shouted the guard. "Who are you?"

"Ropeyarn Rube," returned the other. "I've got a prize for the cap'n."

"What is it?"

"You'll see. Has anything gone wrong this afternoon?"

"Anything?" cried the guard. "Everything has gone the wrong way. Look out for the old man to-night, Ropeyarn, or he'll put a head on yer."

The other laughed, and by this time had made the boat fast to a chain in the wall which he could feel but not see, and then he took Pearl in his arms once more and carried her to the den.

Barry McGrew was sitting before the fire in the most despondent manner, holding a paper, one of the city dailies, which contained a personal which would have made him rub his hands in glee if Pearl had not escaped.

Several of his vile crew were seated around him, their faces reflecting the regret plainly expressed on the countenance of their captain, for he had read the personal to them, and they naturally considered themselves out of pocket in the amount that their share of the twenty thousand dollars would have come to.

When Ropeyarn Rube entered the den they all looked up, and, on beholding a girl in his arms, they all came forward to have a glance at the prize.

They crowded around him eagerly, and with a triumphant look Ropeyarn turned Pearl around so that they could get a fair view of her face.

"It's our prisoner!" cried Barry McGrew.

Then a great cry of joy went up from the hoarse throats of the villains, and one and all clamored to know how Ropeyarn had found her.

The fellow waved them off authoritatively, and said to Barry.

"Where is Chloe?"

"Hyar I is," cried the black giantess, getting up from the floor. "What yer want?"

"I want you to bring this girl around if you can," said Ropeyarn. "She's bin faintin' or something."

"Stick a pin in her," suggested the wicked cook.

"You do, and I'll break your back," cried the captain, who was the only one in the gang of whom Chloe stood in fear. "Bring her to in a proper manner. She's worth twenty thousand to this party, and I'll not have a hair of her head harmed. Look here, on her forehead, and you'll see she hasn't fainted. She's been struck with a club, I guess. Did you go and hit her, Ropeyarn?"

"Nary!" said Ropeyarn.

"How did you get her?"

Ropeyarn related the entire story, and the gang knew

at once that their little snakesman had deserted from them.

"When I get my paws on the little rascal I'll break his blasted neck," blandly said the peacefully disposed Barry McGrew. "We must change the password at once, else everybody will know it. The only thing that troubles me is whether he will split on us to the cops."

The men all thought that he would not do that, for a terrible oath, which the boy had also taken, bound the members of Barry McGrew's band, and they were all of the opinion that he would fear their vengeance too much to take such a step.

"Well, it doesn't matter much, anyhow," said the captain. "We shall soon get the twenty thousand dollars, and then we'll break up housekeeping and start anew in some other place. But I will certainly take great pleasure in twisting the young devil's neck for him, and I shall take advantage of the first opportunity to do it."

Meanwhile the negress had succeeded in arousing Pearl to life by simple remedies, and the girl sat up on the knee of Ropeyarn, who had been detailed as Chloe's assistant, and gazed around her in astonishment.

It seemed to her that she certainly had been dreaming.

There were the river thieves—the burly form of Barry McGrew visible among the rest; there were the dread familiar walls of solid masonry which had hemmed her in such a short time before. She glanced up at the dark form above her, and recognized the black cook, and then the stern and bitter reality dissipated the blessed uncertainty of the dream, and she knew that she was a captive again.

How, she could not form the very least idea, but the horrible truth remained, and what was adding gall to her bitterness, her brave hero friend, her noble Jack, whom in a few eventful hours she had learned to love with an adoring affection, was not with her.

She grew frenzied as she thought of having to stay alone with these rude men and this pitiless negress. Timid natures become bold sometimes, influenced by great excitement. Pearl saw the butt of a revolver peeping from the breast pocket of the man who held her on his knee. She knew not how to use the weapon, but, nevertheless, she knew that it could aid her.

Suddenly grasping the protruding revolver, she leaped away from Ropeyarn, and then, scarcely knowing what

to do, darted forward to the passage, and then stood irresolute.

McGrew uttered a cry of rage and alarm and rushed forward toward his escaping captive, but the frowning muzzle of a pistol stopped him.

"Stand back!" ejaculated Pearl Payson.

CHAPTER XI.

JACK AND FAULKNER.

Capt. Faulkner was not seriously hurt by the bullet of Barry McGrew. It was simply a light scalp wound, from which he experienced but slight ill effect.

Capt. Faulkner was not the kind of enemy who is easily scared. His encounters with Barry McGrew had only whetted the edge of his desire to meet the outlaw leader in a conflict which should put a decided end to their long-standing feud.

He accordingly lay off the line of piers that ranged on either side of the Havana Wharf, for he now felt doubly certain that his old enemy was near him, and he was determined in his decision to hove near the spot until he made his second appearance.

All the long day succeeding the brush with McGrew, Faulkner kept watch over the ground he had mentally marked out as suspicious, but the wary thieves lay low while danger threatened.

Toward evening the captain of the gallant *Causee* made out a boat containing two oarsmen in the vicinity of the Havana wharf. They kept dodging about the piers in a decidedly suspicious manner, and Faulkner made up his mind to overhaul them.

Accordingly he ordered out a boat, and with a dozen of his fearless subordinates he dashed up to the strangers.

To his surprise the oarsmen proved to be two boys.

As the reader has probably conjectured, the two boys were Jack and Muddler, who were about attempting the rescue of Pearl.

"Who are you?" demanded Faulkner, ranging up alongside of the boys' boat.

"Two boys," cautiously replied Jack, who was wondering what the officers could want of him.

Faulkner smiled at the answer.

"And who are you?" he asked.

Jack looked at his questioner for some time before answering. Faulkner could see that the boy was trying

to read him, and accordingly he waited with patience for a reply.

Jack looked long and earnestly at the bold, handsome face. There was everything to inspire admiration and trust in the fearless, frank countenance, and not a feature that could impress him otherwise than favorably.

He conceived a sudden liking for Frank Faulkner; felt that he was a good and true man, and one who might be trusted without reserve.

To Muddler these policemen were so many natural enemies, and he was glancing furtively at them from the corners of his eyes.

"I will answer your questions," boldly answered our hero. "We are rescuers."

Faulkner's fine eyes flashed with deepest appreciation.

"Rescuers?"

"We are," said Jack.

"And whom would you rescue?"

"A girl friend."

"Pearl Payson?" cried the captain.

"Yes," eagerly returned the boy, "Pearl Payson. What is she to you?"

"She's the daughter of a dear friend," said Faulkner, "and I am here to rescue her also. Let us combine."

"With all my heart," said Jack, "But what have you done?"

"Nothing," frankly admitted Faulkner.

"We have done more," said Jack. "We made off with the captive, were attacked, and in the battle we lost her again."

"But do you know where she is?" demanded Faulkner.

"We believe her to be hidden under that long wharf," said Jack.

"We have inspected the whole line," said Faulkner, "but we were unable to decide upon the proper one to investigate. Besides, it would be like running into a trap. How do you propose to work?"

"By giving the password of the gang, and thus passing the guard," said Jack. "Then we will be able to reach the robbers' den, and there lie in waiting for the chance to present itself that can aid the rescue. But if you join us we can march boldly into their midst."

"Then lead on at once," said the impetuous Faulkner. "I will follow."

The captain of the *Causee* was reckless and daring. He could fight like a tiger, but he could not think like a sage.

It must be evident to the reader that it was at least imprudent to follow the lead of two boys into such a place as they were about to lead him. Had they been enemies they could have led him and his brave crew into a horrible trap.

Had he stopped to consider for a single moment, he certainly must have asked them how they became possessed of their knowledge. Then he would certainly have discovered who Jack really was, and by the discovery would have hastened the proof or incorrectness of Dawson's theory.

But he was too full of impatience to accomplish this double purpose—the rescue of Pearl Payson and the capture of Barry McGrew—to have the least forethought. He was a very good fighting captain, but he was not worth a row of pins to plan.

Jack and Muddler led off, rowed carefully under the wharf, and Faulkner's boat came close behind.

Instantly they were enclosed by the walls of the pier, and hemmed in by the almost perfect gloom.

Muddler, knowing the course, handled the oars with care and exactness, and slowly traversed the space.

Suddenly the startling hail of the sentinel came through the darkness.

"Midnight!"

From force of habit, Muddler was prepared to answer "Barry," but the hail disconcerted him.

"Curse the luck!" he broke out; "the old cock's got another password!"

Instantly they both heard the sound of the sentinel's feet.

"What's the matter?" asked Faulkner.

"They have changed the password," replied our hero.

"And what is that sound?" asked Faulkner.

"The noise made by the guard running up the passage to the cave," said Jack.

Taking out a dark lantern, he turned the slide and threw a flood of light ahead, disclosing the passage.

"A cave!" echoed Faulkner.

"Their den is just like a cave," said Jack; "but it's formed by the pier."

"Can they get out that way and make their escape by the other end?"

"No," said Muddler.

"Then forward!" cried Faulkner, "and we'll charge up that passag . We've got them like rats in a trap."

"Go on," said Jack, to Muddler.

The little snakesman shot the boat up to the chains, secured it, and leaped out upon the damp ground.

The dark lantern showed them sufficient light for their purpose, and in a moment Faulkner and his officers were standing by the boys.

"Shall I lead?" cried the fearless Faulkner.

"No," said Jack. "We know the way, and the dangerous points in the constantly turning course; so we'll lead."

"Go on, then," said the captain. "Remember that there's a dozen men at your back who fight like devils; so fear nothing."

Jack and Muddler went slowly along the wet passage, keeping a constant lookout for danger at each curve.

Suddenly Muddler halted.

"We're close," he said, to Jack.

"Gentlemen," said Jack, in a low, guarded voice, "we're very close to the last abrupt turn which would bring us right into the robbers' den. You must move as silently as possible now, and not speak above a low whisper. Just around that bend in the path there may be a score of armed men, desperate brutes who would shoot you down with as little regret as you would kill a mad dog. It is all very well to be brave, but bravery without caution is foolishness, and when you oppose yourself to an old fox like Barry McGrew you must use some of his own cunning to beat him."

"We will place ourselves under your lead," said Faulkner. "Your head is level. Give your orders and we will obey them."

Having confidence in himself, Jack accepted the offer, and assumed command of these men who had all been years in dangerous service.

They recognized the spirit, forethought and judgment of a leader in the lad, and accepted him for their captain.

The newly made captain immediately ordered perfect silence.

Then he tapped Muddler on the shoulder.

"Down on your hands and knees," he said, to his body-guard. "Creep forward as slowly as you please, and tell me what you see."

Down on all fours went Muddler, and with the slow, gliding motion of a snake crept forward toward the den.

He reached the curve, and deliberately peered around the wall.

Quite close to him stood Barry McGrew and his gang,

numbering about eighteen hardy ruffians in all. Each man held a weapon in his hands, and they were all standing in a listening attitude, their bodies bent and their heads inclined toward the passage, eager to catch the least sound.

Muddler only got a glimpse of them with one eye, and his view was all taken in with a single glance. He dared not look longer, for if one of the gang had happened to turn his head slightly the little snakesman must have been discovered.

Muddler slowly crept back to where his young leader was standing.

"Well?" whispered Jack, in his ear.

In like manner Muddler told him what he had seen.

Jack communicated the intelligence to his followers.

"What will you do?" asked Faulkner.

"Wait until I deliberate a moment," returned the youthful captain, and, resting his head on his hand, he thought deeply for a few minutes.

To rush upon the prepared enemy would be to consign to death many men of his brave company; to stay there until the robbers saw fit to make a movement might be tedious work; and, therefore, Jack tried to make a compromise.

He turned to the expectant Faulkner, who was handling his revolver in a nervous manner.

"Suppose I call upon them to surrender?"

"You can try it," said Faulkner.

"I will," said Jack. "If they refuse I have a plan that must work."

Raising his voice, he called:

"Barry McGrew!"

No answer.

"You may as well answer," continued our hero. "I know that you are there."

"Well?" came back, in the outlaw captain's surly tones.

"I want to make a proposal to you," said the boy captain.

"Go on," said McGrew.

"I have a large number of armed men at my back," continued our hero, "and they are all thirsting for your blood."

"Let 'em thirst, then," chuckled Barry McGrew.

"But we have come to rescue Pearl Payson from your hands," said Jack. "We mean to do it, if we fight to the last man. You are in a perfect trap; you cannot get

out of it by any other avenue than this passage. Now, if you will send us the girl, we will leave you, and allow you five hours to make your escape from this den, after which time we shall hunt you down again if we can. I am not sure of victory; neither are you. If the matter is fought out, several must die; you may be among the number. I am backed by Capt. Faulkner and a crew from the police boat *Causee*. We are here to rescue Pearl Payson, and we'll do it. What have you to say to my proposition?"

"That I won't give up the prize," cried the captain of the river thieves. "Your blow about Faulkner and his men may be gospel, or it may be all gas. If you are so well backed, my jolly young rooster, why don't you sail in? I'd just like to clip your spurs. Come on, my reefer, and we will fight it out."

"Fight it is," whispered Jack to the much-pleased Faulkner, who was greatly delighted at the prospect of a scrimmage. "Listen attentively while I tell you my plan."

CHAPTER XII.

IT WAS THE MANIAC.

Capt. Faulkner and his men gave respectful attention while he whispered his instructions.

"I will close off my dark lantern entirely," said Jack. "Then I will creep forward to the bend and get upon my feet again. One by one, so as to make the least possible noise, and to prevent even the slight sound which might be caused by two bodies coming in contact, you must all creep up to me and stand erect and silent. Then, when you are all there, with your weapons in your hands, I will turn the slide full on, and flash the brilliant, dazzling light in the faces of the waiting outlaws. That will be the signal for you to rush in and fire upon them while they are half blinded."

"Why not merely thrust our pistols around the curve at that instant and fire into the crowd without taking aim? We would be sure to hit. We should not be exposed, you see."

The question came from Faulkner, who was of the opinion that he had, for once in his life, conceived an idea in a battle other than that of mere fighting, but he was speedily corrected by our thoughtful hero.

"You must see your mark," said he. "How do you know, shooting in the manner that you propose, that your bullets may not kill the girl?"

"You've got a perfect right to command," said the pleased Faulkner, admiring the young leader's sagacity. "We will obey your orders implicitly."

"Then stand perfectly still," said Jack, "while I count out a number to each man, giving him the time when to creep forward. Don't forget your numbers. Two men must not move at one time."

He named Faulkner as number one, and then counted out numbers to the rest.

Then he carefully adjusted a slide of his dark lantern so as to be able to turn it on full without mistake, and carefully advanced toward his post.

One by one the men followed him, and in a short time his command was drawn up three abreast, every man grasping a cocked revolver, and Faulkner clutching two of the weapons.

Jack cast one comprehensive glance over them, and then turned on his light with a sharp twist, took a single step around the bend, and flashed the blinding glare in the eyes of the thieves.

Almost simultaneously with the action of our young hero, the officers leaped forward, and, taking a quick aim, fired.

Loud cries of pain told that some of the bullets had found a mark.

The outlaws could not see, being blinded by the brilliant glare of the lantern, but Barry McGrew took a hasty aim at the light, fired, and sent it spinning out of Jack's hand.

"Forward!" cried our hero.

"Charge!" cried Faulkner. "Cut them down without mercy!"

He leaped forward with his men, but the outlaws sent them reeling back with a well-directed volley.

"Follow!" shrieked Jack, leaping over the bleeding forms of the fallen officers. "Take that, you villain!"

With the last words he shot down an ugly brute who was about firing upon Faulkner; the robber fell face downward and did not move.

"At last!" yelled Faulkner, as he bounded toward Barry McGrew.

"At last!" shouted the outlaw captain.

They both pulled up at each other, took rapid aim, and fired.

Both stood unharmed.

Their bullets must have met in the air. In no other man-

ner can the fact that both of them escaped injury be explained.

The den became filled with smoke; the combatants surged in between the two deadly foes, and they became separated.

Men cannot stand up long and shoot each other down with revolvers; it's level-headed work, and when they become excited and commence to grapple.

So it was with the rescuing party and Barry McGrew's outlaws. They soon grappled and tumbled, and wrestled, and fought, and though less deadly were fully as desperate.

Jack's first thought was of Pearl.

He looked around the den in vain. Pearl was not there.

He shouted aloud for her, but the noise of the combat was too great for his voice to be heard.

He bounded forward and wrenched open the door of the storeroom.

At the same time Muddler leaped forward to assist him.

"What's up?" asked the little snakesman.

"Pearl—I cannot find her," said Jack, and, with Muddler at his side, he leaped forward.

There were the boxes, bales, and all the other stuff as he had seen them before, but no sign of the girl.

"Pearl!" he called.

"Think I heard sumthin'," said Muddler.

"Pearl!" cried Jack, louder than before, and this time a muffled cry reached him.

"Jack!"

"She is here!" shouted the brave youth, and sprang forward in the direction from which the cry came. "Pearl, where are you?"

This time, although he waited a moment, no answering cry came back to him.

Jack was puzzled.

Muddler got an idea.

"Maybe de old nigger woman has got her paw over de gal's mouth."

"Then she's up among those bales," said our hero, and, with Muddler at his heels, he began to jump around the room, turning over the various packages in his eager search, and, in the excitement of the moment, knocking around huge bundles that he could not have moved in a cooler moment.

With Muddler's aid he hurled aside a great bale of goods, and there discovered Chloe and Pearl; the negress was holding the girl with one hand and covering her mouth with the other.

The black giantess immediately released the girl and promptly knocked Jack as flat as a pancake with her huge paw, but Muddler as promptly tripped her up and sent her rolling—she was too fat to really fall—to the ground.

There the hands of the gritty Chloe were not idle. She reached out one black hand and caught Muddler by the ankle. A strong pull, and down came the little snakesman with a loud thump.

Pearl had been half-suffocated by the huge black paw that had covered both nose and mouth, and lay on the ground trying to recover her breath.

Jack got upon his feet again, and at this moment the captain of the outlaws came rushing into the room.

He had ordered Chloe to secrete herself in the store-room with the captive; noting the fact that the door was open, he knew at once that the portal had been forced by some of the rescuing party, and at once darted thither to see to the safety of his prize.

He held a long, cruel-looking knife in his hand.

With a wild cry of hate and rage he rushed upon our hero.

Jack attempted to draw his pitol in time to defend himself from his assailant, but the captain must have cut him down had not that wild shriek echoed through the room and stayed his hand as it had done when once before he stood before the youthful hero with upraised blade.

His weapon fell from his hand, and at that instant Jack took quick aim at him and shot him through the shoulder. With a howl of pain Barry McGrew fell.

The negress jumped up and made a most desperate clutch at Jack, but Muddler, whose hard head had saved his skull from breaking, forestalled her by a neat kick in the stomach, which put an end to the battle.

At this moment Faulkner and his brave followers entered the room, having taken as prisoners all of the thieves who were not dead or dying; he, the captain, sprang to the side of the girl, who was now resting peacefully in Jack's arms, feeling that at last the term of her captivity had come to an end.

Her enemies were either dead or in the hands of the officers of justice, her cruel abductor lay groaning on the floor, Jack, dear, faithful Jack, held her in his arms, her

mother's betrothed husband was by her side and she was happy again.

"Are you injured, my dear Pearl?" anxiously inquired Faulkner.

"Not at all, thank you," replied the young girl. "And I'm so happy."

Capt. Faulkner smiled shrewdly as he cast a sly look at Jack, and our hero blushed like a girl.

"Never blush, man," cried Faulkner. "You are brave, she is fair, and you'll make a well-mated couple in a few years."

Jack blushed redder than before, and, to conceal his confusion, asked the rosy Pearl how she had been retaken.

The girl related all that she knew, being what she had learned from hearing the robbers talk of the recapture; then she related her attempt to get away when she came to her senses and found herself a captive again.

"And when I stood before him with the pistol in my hand," said Pearl, "I should have fired if he had advanced. But before a word could be said, the sentinel came up the passage and caught me in his arms, and that was the end of my bravery."

Jack pressed her to his heart as if he would reassure her.

The robbers were now ranged in a line and tied to each other, several of them being either handcuffed or "nipped," and then the captain of the outlaw gang was attended to as well as possible under the circumstances, and he was left, along with the wounded, dead and dying, under the eyes of a detailed guard.

Then Jack's lantern was brought into use, and the party triumphantly marched back through the passage; the boats took them out into the clear, moonlit water, and they felt thankful that they had escaped the fate of the two brave officers who would never follow Frank Faulkner's lead again.

Faulkner detailed three officers to conduct Jack, Muddler and Pearl to the latter's home, and to save time they were landed on the pier, while the boat, with Faulkner and the remaining men pulled away to the *Causee*.

The officers walked over the pier to the street, and then followed on toward the west side of the town, not noting the skulking figure which hovered near them, keeping them constantly in sight.

It was the maniac!

CHAPTER XIII.

WHERE IS JACK?

When Capt. Faulkner reached the deck of the *Causee* he was met by Sir Francis Clifton, who eagerly asked the news.

"Glorious news," said Faulkner, pointing to the sullen prisoners. "We scooped 'em this time."

"But did you rescue——"

"Oh, the girl is on the way home to her mother under a special guard."

"And the boy?" said the baronet.

"The devil!" cried Faulkner.

It now occurred to him for the first time that he had not even thought of asking the brave young leader his name.

"And, of course," muttered Faulkner, "he must have been the son of the fisherman who was captured along with Pearl. That accounts for his wanting to rescue her. What a thundering feather-brain I am when there's any chance of a fight!"

"What are you muttering about?" asked the baronet.

"About my stupidity," frankly admitted the captain. "I have probably been in company with the boy and did not even suspect that he was the youth that you are so very anxious to see."

"Will you please be kind enough to give me a clear explanation?" asked Sir Francis.

"Yes, as soon as I attend to these men," said Faulkner.

The latter then gave directions for stowing away the prisoners until they could be taken to the New York cells, and after attending to this business he gave Sir Francis a full account of all that had taken place from the moment that he left the deck of the *Causee* up to the present moment, and then added:

"So you see what a fool I've been?"

"I do," bluntly said Sir Francis, "but there is time to repair your folly."

"What shall I do?"

"Run in at any pier at once."

"Yes."

"Then go immediately to Dawson."

"Yes."

"And together we will go there."

"Where?"

"Where the boy is, of course," cried Sir Francis.

"Oh!" cried Faulkner. "Yes, he will certainly stay some time at Mrs. Payson's house, perhaps some days; we will go there, and, as you say, we'll take the trouble to go after Dawson. It is but right, if he has made a good inference, that he should have all the honor and triumph that can possibly come from it."

"Then you'll put ashore at once?"

"I will give my orders now," said Faulkner, and, ringing a bell, he gave instructions to the man who appeared to head for some available pier and make fast.

In a moment the engines were at work, and soon the *Causee* was tied by a hawser to a wharf.

Faulkner and the baronet immediately leaped ashore, and made all haste to the office of the detective, whom they found at work.

"On with your hat and coat," cried the eager Faulkner, breaking forth in his customary slap-dash style; "we've got the boy!"

"You have?"

"Sure."

"Where is he?"

"At the house of a friend," said Faulkner. "Don't ask any more questions, but come along with me."

The detective was not slow in preparing himself for the street, and in two minutes he was walking rapidly along with his friends.

Dawson led them direct to the house of Mrs. Payson, just as if he knew all about the recent events.

"How do you know he is here?" demanded the surprised Faulkner.

"Because if you've got the boy, you've also got the girl," said Dawson, "and if they're at the house of a friend of yours the most probable place is here."

"I wish I had your headpiece," said the captain of the *Causee*, as he drew the knob of the doorbell. "Yes, the boy is here, and in a few minutes we shall know whether he is the stolen heir or not."

The door was opened by a servant, who took them at once to the parlor, where Mrs. Payson sat, as she had been doing for the past hour, with her daughter in her arms.

Muddler was sitting on the very edge of a crimson repp chair, looking as if he were really afraid to put his feet on the handsome light carpet. Jack was not in the room.

Mrs. Payson was, of course, congratulated on the termination of her troubles.

"But where is Jack?" asked the detective.

"Jack?" repeated Mrs. Payson.

"My Jack, you know!" said Pearl, and blushed like a rose.

"Oh, the boy," said Mrs. Payson. "He left the room some ten minutes ago, saying he would not be gone long."

"Then he'll be in soon," said Dawson, and then the detective turned his attention to Muddler, who, as can be imagined, looked as much out of place in that parlor as the legendary pig.

The detective recognized the class to which the boy belonged at first glance, but there was something in Muddler's face which interested him.

"Who are you, my boy?" he asked.

"Muddler," was the laconic reply.

"I'm to understand that Muddler is your name?"

The boy nodded.

"And what are you?"

"Jack's bodyguard," was the unsatisfactory reply Dawson received.

"What used you to be?" persisted Dawson.

"A little snakesman."

"Ah!" cried Dawson. "That's the ticket. What made you turn your coat?"

"I'll tell yer the hull yarn if yer like," said the boy, and the detective expressing himself anxious to hear it, Muddler told him the story of his conversion through comparison with the noble Jack.

"Stick to your young friend and he'll make a man of you," said Dawson. "By the way, I would like you to hunt him up for me."

"I'll try," said Muddler, and proceeded to hunt for his young leader in every part of the house and garden, but, although he visited every nook and shouted himself hoarse, he could find no trace of him.

With a sober countenance, Dawson joined in the search, and soon the entire party were all hunting around the house for the young hero. But no trace of him could be found.

Then they went through the different streets near at hand, and after vainly searching for him returned to Mrs. Payson's, where Pearl was crying softly to herself.

The men looked anxiously at each other, and the same question involuntarily came from each of them:

"Where is Jack?"

CHAPTER XIV.

WHAT BECAME OF JACK?

What became of Jack?

Why, he simply fell into the hands of his enemies, and in a very little time after his escape was again a captive.

But how?

We will relate the story.

At about the time that Jack and his friends went together with the officers to the home of the pretty Pearl, it happened that Lawrence Lyle and Salty Sam were walking around the town.

Suddenly the old sailor seized his companion by the arm and pointed ahead to where a number of persons had just turned the corner; it was the joyous six, who were on their way to Mrs. Payson's.

"There's the animal," said the fisherman.

"Who?"

"The boy."

"Where?"

"Among that party—the biggest one of the two boys, with the cop on his right."

"That's Jack, is it?"

"Yes," said Salty, "that's Jack."

"Then let us keep him in sight."

"But the bobbies?" said Salty.

"What of them?"

"They're too many for us."

"Shut up, you old fool," said Lyle. "I want to see where he goes."

"Oh!" said Salty Sam.

The two worthies hurried after our young friends, keeping near enough to the party to keep them in sight, and yet not near enough to excite suspicion in the minds of the officers.

But it was not long before Lawrence Lyle became aware that he and Salty Sam were not alone in their spying; on the other side of the street from where they were walking they occasionally caught sight of an old man who seemed to be trying to keep out of view as much as possible.

It was the old maniac of the den.

"Wonder what that chap wants?" thought Lyle.

"He's dogging the party, too," spoke out the fisherman.

"So it seems," said Lyle, and at that very moment the glare from the druggist's window caused both of them to lower their eyes, and when they looked up again the old man had disappeared.

"Guess he wasn't anything but some ragpicker, after all," said Lyle.

The two villains, master and man, followed the party to Mrs. Payson's house, saw three of them, the officers, come forth shortly after, and knew that the three young people were still in the house.

They were so intent on watching the house where their prey had entered that they failed to notice the fact that a form, bowed nearly double, had approached and taken up a position behind a good-sized tree.

"Sam!" said Lyle.

"Ay, ay," said Salty.

"Go and get a carriage at once."

"Bring it here?"

"Yes."

"A closed coach?"

"Yes."

"May I know——"

"Yes, you may know all. I'm going to hang around here and wait until that kid comes out. Get the worst hang-dog villain of a driver that you see with a cab. You'll find a line of coaches at that big hotel around the corner."

"And you'll wait till you nab him?"

"If it takes a week," said Lyle. "He must not run at large. Go."

"I'm off," said Salty, and went straight to the nearest hackstand.

He followed Lyle's instructions, and picked out the most villainous-looking driver that one could wish for, and with the latter drove around the corner and pulled up a short distance from Lyle, who was still keeping watch.

The latter took a look at the driver, and was satisfied with Salty's selection.

"Now, my man," he said, to the prison-bird-looking wretch, "I want to give you your instructions, and if you have a chance to carry them out and do so in a proper and satisfactory style it will benefit you by just this little amount."

He held a crisp ten-dollar bill before the evil-faced hackman, and the man's little eyes snapped greedily.

"Trust me, yer honor," he said, with a most significant grin, "if the chance comes along the money's mine."

"That's satisfactory," said Lyle. "Here is what you may have to do.

"If a certain boy comes out of that house just there

I'm going to nab him. I'll have some plan to get him to come near, and then I want to tumble him over and bundle him into the coach. If I should need your aid to secure the chap, you must not hesitate to crack him over the head with the butt of your whip; but if I and my companion can manage the affair alone, you need only hold open the door until we're aboard with him, then up on your box and drive like the devil to this address. Can you read?"

"I can," said the coachman, taking the card Lyle held out to him, and holding it up to the moonlight. "Anything else, sir?"

"No."

"Then I'm all ready," said Jehu.

"Here he comes," said Salty, as our hero came forth on the steps of the house to get a few breaths of fresh air. "What's your plan?"

"Mock fight; not much noise," said Lyle, and in a moment he and Salty were struggling together, Lyle calling in faint tones that could not have got beyond Jack's ears:

"Help! Murder! Help!"

The cunning trick succeeded.

The cries were heard by the brave boy, and in an instant he dashed down the steps and leaped toward the struggling pair.

The hackman threw open the door of his cab, and stood by it with his reins firmly grasped in his hand.

Jack rushed toward them. As he came within reach of Salty's arm, the old fisherman coolly knocked him down, and Jack fell flat to the pavement.

In a moment he was inside the hack, and the horse trotted away.

But on the springs, clinging like a cat to his frail hold, rode the bowed form.

It was the maniac!

CHAPTER XV.

MORE MYSTERY.

Jack opened his eyes.

When knocked down by the broad fist of the old fisherman his head came thump on the hard flagstones. A mere blow with the fist he would have recovered from in five minutes, but it was fully an hour after the moment of his recapture when he came back to consciousness.

He sat up in the bed which supported his bruised and tired frame, and tried, by the moonlight, which came

through the window in long, slanting bars of yellow beauty, to see where he was.

He remembered rushing to the aid of the man who was calling feebly for help; he could remember that his head came in contact with something, and that he fell, but after that all was a blank.

The moonlight was very radiant, and showed him that he was in a small, square room, furnished with an ordinary bedroom suite of furniture, and it also showed him, on closer inspection, that the window was heavily barred.

"Little chance of escape that way," thought Jack, and, getting up from the bed, he crossed, with unsteady steps, to the window, seized the bars, one after another, and found that they were firmly set.

A vine grew up the side of the house and twined over the cold bars.

Jack's head felt light, large and dizzy, and with the hope of reviving himself, he broke off a piece of the strong vine and inhaled its fragrance.

He felt better after that, and, going carefully over to the door, he tried that—it was locked on the outside, and its strong panels defied his strength.

He sat down on the bed and tried to think where he was.

"It's easy enough to imagine how I got here, wherever this may be," thought Jack, "but what bothers me is to think who trapped me? Salty Sam? It doesn't seem possible; and yet, who else can it be? The outlaws, the river thieves? No, for they are all prisoners, or else wounded or dead. It was night and moonlight when I knew anything before, it is night and it is moonlight still. It does not seem to me that I have been insensible long, so I must still be in the city. Maybe I can see from this window."

His head was a little clearer now, and his eyesight as good as ever. He approached the window and gazed out upon the great city, lying peacefully in the moon's ambient beams.

"If it were Salty Sam alone, I should not be in the city," said Jack to himself. "Somebody else is my enemy, but that will not cause me to fret. I've met and conquered a great many enemies in a few days, and I shall not show the white feather now."

Just at this moment the sound of footsteps sounded in the house, and were soon near at hand. In a trice two or

three bolts were shot back and as Jack turned his head Salty Sam and Lawrence Lyle entered the room.

The old fisherman carried a large salver on his hand which held a very decent sort of meal; whether Jack was really hungry or not we cannot say, but the sight of good food was not distasteful to one who had been forced to live as he had lately lived.

Lyle carried a large lamp in his hand, which he set down on the bureau. Then he took up a position near the door.

"So it's you, is it?" cried Jack, looking the old fisherman in the eye.

"Looks like me, I s'pose," said Salty.

"But who is this other chap?" unceremoniously asked Jack. "I know that he is my enemy, but I want to know his name."

The two men exchanged glances.

"My name is Smith," said Lyle; "John Smith."

"You're sure it's not Brown, or, perhaps, Jones or Jenkins?" asked Jack, looking hard at the villain, who, though amused by the boy's questions, did not make any reply.

"Here's grub fer yer," broke in Salty. "Yer can eat it or not, jes' as yer please. I advise yer to eat. Yer see them bars?"

"I do," said Jack.

"Well, that blocks yer escape that way," said the comforting fisherman. "The door has got lots o' bolts on the outside; we'll both be near at hand to look arter ye, so yer see yer can't slip yer cables very easy. Now I'll tell yer what I'm ready to do fer yer."

"I'm all attention," said Jack, putting his hand to his head, where a large lump was paining considerably. "You've done quite a good deal for me already."

The old salt grinned.

"If yer'll promise to come back home with me as quiet as possible, and stay thar with me, I'll give yer a brand new suit o' clothes, send yer off to the Hook, and let yer buy a yacht for to go pleasin' around in, and be a good father to yer."

"And suppose I refuse?"

"Then I'll keep yer here, whack yer three or four times a day with a rope's end, starve yer grit clean out o' yer, and then bring yer home, whether or no."

"Go ahead, then," said Jack.

"What do you mean?" asked Lyle. "Will you go home with your father?"

"No," cried Jack, facing the Englishman, with a flash in his black eyes that caused Lyle to quail. "No; a thousand times, no! Do your worst, both of you, and I defy you. You may torture me—may beat and starve me—but you cannot crush the spirit and courage which are mine by right of birth, nor outplan those wits which tell me I am the son of a gentleman. Do your worst! I defy you!"

The words fell from his lips in a torrent of hot, fiery eloquence, resistless as the flood of lava that rolls from the burning mountain. Lyle and his slave stood rooted to the floor in astonishment, and for a moment neither of them stirred.

Then Lyle picked up the light, unlocked the door, and, beckoning to Salty, passed out of the room, and, as the bolts shot into their sockets, the boy heard him say:

"Did you ever see anything like it, Sam? When he stood up, with his eyes blazing, he was the very image of his father."

Jack's heart gave a great bound, and he felt that he could almost bless the man for the words he had uttered.

His heart had told him truly. Salty Sam was not his father.

Somewhere in this wide world, perhaps, he had a father, maybe a dear mother, who would clasp him to her breast and weep for joy over her long-lost, darling child. He drew a rare picture in his mind of a grand-looking man, his father, and a sweet-faced, loving woman, his mother, both perfect beings who could call him by the name of son. He could clasp his mother's form to his broad, young bosom, and feel her very heart beating for joy; he could look up into his father's noble face and behold the tear drop dimming the luster of those commanding orbs which now regarded him so tenderly. Ah! it was a rarely sweet picture that the boy drew in his dreamy fancy, and while viewing it with blissful delight, he found himself crying softly, and the reality came back to him again.

"But I am more satisfied now," murmured the boy, to himself, dashing the tears away with a resolute hand. "I feel that there is a near future at hand for me, a time not very far distant when all I have seen in my beautiful air castle may come to me again as a blessed reality. I will be sensible and cunning and outwit my enemies. I will eat, be strong, vigilant, and if I cannot make my escape,

then die fighting for liberty and the possible realization of my dream."

With this resolve he set to work at the food which was on the salver, and by the aid of the moonlight managed to distinguish one thing from another.

After eating as much as he could he placed the rest of the food in one of the drawers of the bureau, as a slight precaution against the threat of Salty Sam that he would starve the grit out of him.

The food he had eaten made him drowsy; he was aching from head to foot with bruises, not to mention the fatigue of the day. The bed looked white and clean, suggestive of peaceful sleep, and the boy concluded that the best thing he could do would be to turn in.

Having come to this determination, Jack began to undress himself.

A strange, scratching noise below his window caused him to approach the bars and try to peer downward. The noise ceased, and he continued to remove his clothes.

One shoulder had been bruised by his fall on the flagstones. Jack removed all covering from the bruised part, allowing the moonlight to play upon the arm, revealing a large and bright crimson cross glowing warmly on his shoulder in the cold, pale light.

"I wonder how that crimson cross came on my shoulder," murmured Jack. "Perhaps it is a birthmark, and I shall one day be identified by it." A shadow fell on him; he looked up and started with surprise. The maniac grasping one of the bars, and apparently standing in the strong vine which clambered up the house, was looking in upon him.

No; not at him, but at the crimson cross which seemed to blaze on the white skin; his dark eyes lost their fierceness; a soft light crept into their shining depths, and, stretching forth one thin hand through the iron bars, he cried:

"Robert, my child, come to me!"

Then his head fell on his chest, and he would have fallen to the ground had it not been that Jack, obeying an impulse which the passionate cry of the old man awakened within him, sprang forward and seized the extended hand. Exerting all his strength, the hardy boy drew the heavy frame of the old man up until he was resting on the broad coping of the window sill, and then he paused for breath.

The old man was heavy, although his large bones were scarcely covered with flesh. The moon shed soft beams

on the thin, fine-looking face of the maniac as it rested against the stones at the side of the sash, and Jack felt a strange warmth and tenderness creeping around his heart as he gazed upon the unconscious old man.

Now that the fiery eyes, fiery with the blaze of insanity, were closed, the old man looked noble and handsome, and without knowing why he did so, Jack warmly pressed the hand he still grasped.

Jack dared not let go his hold, for the poor old man, suddenly returning to life, might tumble headlong to the ground.

"Why has he followed me, this maniac? What did he climb up to my window sill for? Did he think to rescue me? I wonder why it is that my heart warms toward him? Why do I take pleasure in merely pressing his hand? Ah, and I wonder what made him swoon away when he looked at my shoulder? Was it the crimson cross?"

With these and a hundred more thoughts chasing through his excited brain the boy held on to the hand of the old man, waiting, with his very heart in his mouth, for the maniac to revive.

A pleasant breeze swept across the window, and the old man, a maniac no longer, drew a long breath and opened his eyes.

He gazed steadfastly at the face of the boy who grasped his hand, looked slowly over the city, and then down at the large garden below, and then his gaze came back to Jack.

A puzzled look, an expression which spoke of equal wonder and curiosity, crept into his large, placid, black eyes, and he asked:

"Where am I, and how came I here?"

CHAPTER XVI.

DAWSON'S KEEN WORK.

When the searchers found that our hero had really disappeared, and that it was fruitless to call for him, they all sat down in Mrs. Payson's parlor and held a council of war.

The noise they had made attracted some of the neighbors to the spot, and one ventured to enter the house and inquire what the cause of the outcry was.

Dawson told him.

"Well," said the neighbor, "I don't know that it's got anything to do with the case, but I remember that about

an hour ago I heard a slight disturbance, resembling a scuffle, and, on going to the door, I saw a closed coach, one of the common hacks, driving rapidly away."

"That's enough," said Dawson. "I could follow him to Jericho with such a clew as that!"

"You can?" cried Faulkner.

"Follow and see," said the detective, and in a moment he was out of the house, with Sir Francis and the captain at his side.

"Hold on a minute," said Dawson, placing his hand to his forehead. "Where is the nearest hackstand? I know; come on."

He walked rapidly around the corner, and came in sight of the hacks standing in a line before the huge hotel. He tapped one of the drivers on the arm.

"Who went off with a fare about an hour ago?"

"Jim Blake," said the man; "that driver what's just hitching his nag. He's just come in."

This was enough for Dawson.

He walked up to Jim Blake, who proved to be the villainous driver employed by Lyle.

Dawson laid his hand rather heavily on the man's shoulder, threw back his coat, and, as the fellow turned around, said:

"Look at this, my man."

The driver looked and saw the badge on Dawson's vest.

He turned a little pale, and the detective could feel the arm that he grasped tremble violently.

"He is my man," said Dawson, to himself.

"What do you want, sir?" asked the man, trying to speak most respectfully.

"I want to know where you carried that boy to," sternly said the detective. "Answer me at once and truly, or you'll sleep this night in the Tombs. I am in haste, and will not be trifled with, so speak out at once or suffer."

"I don't know what——"

The fellow was beginning to stammer out a protest when a sudden exclamation from Capt. Faulkner caused him to look at that gentleman. The quick-tempered Frank had drawn a revolver from his pocket, and was handling it in a nervous sort of style, while casting dark glances at the hackman.

The fellow shivered as he caught sight of the weapon, and with a cool smile Dawson spoke again:

"Don't you think you'd better answer me, my man? My friend here is a regular fire-eater when he gets started,

and at the present moment your life isn't worth the amount of two cents. Where did you take the boy?"

The hackman cast one nervous glance at the revolver in Faulkner's hands, and then he caved in.

"I've lost the address——"

"That won't do me for an answer," broke in Dawson.

"I was going to say, sir, that I had lost the card what had the address, but I knows the street and the house, and if yer will jump in I'll drive yer there."

"That'll do," cried Sir Francis Clifton.

"Who'll guard him from treachery?" demanded the detective.

"I will," said Faulkner. "I'll ride on the box with him. If I only think he's playing a trick on us I'll send a ball through his brain."

"Then it's a go," said Dawson, throwing the door of the hack open. "In with you, Sir Francis. Jump up, Faulkner!"

Dawson saw that Faulkner was in his seat on the box, holding a pistol in his hand, and then the detective leaped in, closed the door, and the hack rolled away.

"This is the quickest and keenest detective work that I have ever seen," said the much-pleased baronet. "Dawson, you're a bloodhound."

Nothing could have pleased Dawson more.

The coach rolled on swiftly, the driver putting the horses to good speed, and in a short time the vehicle pulled up in front of the house where Jack had been carried.

Dawson and the baronet jumped out, the captain jumped down, and together the three resolute men entered the garden, and as they did so a cry of surprise broke from the detective, as he pointed up to where the old man rested on the window sill, sustained by Jack's strong arm.

"Forward," said Faulkner. "Rap at the door, and if it isn't opened at once, we'll batter it down. We're in a lonely part of the city; there are no policemen around, and we must depend upon ourselves."

He leaped forward to pull the bell, but at that very moment the door was opened by Lawrence Lyle.

and Salty Sam, who was behind the master, tumbled over also. In a moment Faulkner was upon the old fisherman, and in less than two minutes more the knotted handkerchiefs of the rescuers served as bonds upon the prostrate rascals.

"Come on," cried Dawson, locking the door and catching up a large lamp. "I can find the boy, Jack. Jack, where are you?"

No answer came back.

"Follow up the stairs," cried the eager Dawson, who felt that the important hour was now at hand. "Jack, Jack, where are you?" and so on through the first hallway and up to the second, and then a clear, ringing voice answered:

"Here!"

The door was tried; it was locked. Faulkner and the baronet threw themselves against it, and it crashed inward. The light from the lamp glowed on the strange picture formed by Jack, standing half-clothed by the barred window, grasping the hand of the man who rested on the sill.

The detective raised the light on high, and even while he, as well as the others, gazed in astonishment upon the strange scene, a cry of triumph broke from his lips.

"Behold!" he cried; "there is the mark of the crimson cross; he is the stolen heir to the estates and title of Lyle!"

"Lyle!" cried the old man from without the bars. "Lyle! ay, that is my name. I am Robert, Lord Lyle!"

"Father and son!" cried Dawson.

"For Heaven's sake let us be cool!" cried the baronet. "Dawson, Faulkner, seize one of these bars with me and pull it from its socket."

In a moment the bar was wrenched from its bed.

Another and another followed, and then the old man was drawn in by willing hands and seated on the bed.

"Let me look at him closely," cried Sir Francis Clifton. "I knew him once."

"And I am his brother-in-law," said Capt. Faulkner. "I shall know him."

"But I know him better than either!" cried the newly-discovered son and heir. "He is my father; my heart tells me that, for it went out to him in tenderness a long time ago. Father!"

"My Robert, my child!" fondly murmured the old man, and his thin arms clasped the boy close to his heart.

"It is the missing Lord of Lyle," said Frank Faulkner.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

"Knock him down," said Dawson, as the villain appeared.

Capt. Faulkner very promptly straightened the rascal,

"Changed, fearfully changed, but I can recognize him still."

"And so can I," said the baronet, with a big lump in his throat, for at the moment that he had discovered the stolen child he had also found the husband of the woman who had promised to reward him with her hand in marriage. "Changed, as you say, but still Lord Robert of Lyle."

The old man looked up and extended a hand to each of his old friends.

"I know you," he said, his voice trembling with joy. "You are my brother-in-law, Frank Faulkner, and you my old friend Clifton. But what have I been doing for years? It seems to me that I have awakened from a dream, and yet I can remember the streets of a city, a den underground, a gang of thieves, fights, escapes—oh, Heaven! have I been mad?"

"Yes, father," whispered Jack, or Robert, as we should call him. "I have known you for a few days and you were a maniac until this hour!"

"And who stole my child?" demanded Lord Lyle, turning to Faulkner.

"Your brother, Lawrence Lyle, in order that he might kill you with grief, and then succeed to the title and estates in the absence of the proper heir," replied Faulkner. "He is below, tied up like the dog he is, and shall be dealt with as you desire."

"Go to him and relate all that has transpired, and bid him never show his face to me again. He has injured me deeply, but I may not lift my hand against my brother. I have been under a fearful cloud for many years, and now that God has seen fit to restore me to reason and the utmost happiness, I should not begin my second life with an act of vengeance. Tell me, is my wife alive and well?"

"She is," said Sir Francis.

"Then I am content," said the happy lord. "Let the evil man begone from my path, and then I will go with you where you will."

* * * * *

The curtain rises again on the last scene of our life drama in the parlors of the old Lyle manor in England.

The tableaux we present are but the fond realizing of our hero's dreams.

He is standing proudly erect, with the sobbing form of Lady Lyle held joyously to his proud bosom, while his father, now resembling the commanding-looking man the boy had pictured in his mind, stood at his side, gazing

down upon him and the weeping mother with a world of tenderness breaking from his softened black eyes.

"Mother," whispers the boy, and she answers:

"Robert, my son!"

How sweet are those words to the ears and hearts of each; how inestimable the kiss of maternal and filial love that causes their lips to cling together; it is taking in the fresh, blessed sweetness, the glorious reality of a new life, and is joy beyond price to their hearts.

The door softly opens and Muddler, handsomely dressed, peeps in; then he walks in to the room, and behind him file Capt. Faulkner and Mrs. Payson, while Pearl timidly brings up the rear.

The pen of the author is powerless to tell of such a scene in all its fullness, for who can write of the joy, the tenderness, the heart-born emotions that overflow in such a glad reunion as this?

Our hero, Robert Lyle, would not part with the beautiful lassie who had shared his imprisonment, nor would he be separated from Muddler, who took the name that justly fell to his share by its being discarded by Robert, and, adding the latter to it, he became Jack Lyle, and is now being educated in an English college at the expense of Lord Lyle.

Capt. Faulkner married Mrs. Payson in England, and settled down there, in order, as he jokingly observed, to give the young Lord of Lyle a good chance to finish his courtship.

Our hero perfected his education at the best colleges, and will soon enter Parliament.

He has wooed Pearl successfully, and they were united a short time ago in the presence of their numerous friends.

Dawson was there, and was the lion of the day, for the strange history of father and son had been told without reserve, and all the guests looked with admiration upon the man who had connected the three cases by the strength of his brain, and who had proved the fisherman's son to be the stolen heir through the evidence of the crimson cross.

THE END.

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